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**Laughing at the Funeral: Gender and Anthropology  
in the Greek Funerary Rites**

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СРПСКА АКАДЕМИЈА НАУКА И УМЕТНОСТИ  
ЕТНОГРАФСКИ ИНСТИТУТ

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у родној и антрополошкој  
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A banal truth of everything in life and of life itself is that nothing is endless, and that we usually cannot predict the timing of

someone's life or somebody's presence in our life. Big losses of people who are closest to our hearts are always followed with the enormous pain and this pain would be probably unbearable if we would not feel the gratitude for their lives and their presence in our lives. I will finish these acknowledgements and leave the book to a reader, with this gratefulness.

In Belgrade, October, 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009

## **Additional note**

For the Greek words that appear in the text I have used Latin transliteration (with no accentuation signs), while for the longer passages, quotations and some phrases and references on dictionary entries (usually in the footnotes), I have used Greek alphabet. Well established names are left as they are in English. Whenever it was possible, ancient texts were taken from the Perseus digital library ([www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu)), in Greek or Latin original and in English translation. However, I always mention the editor and the translation of the Text. Byzantine texts from Migne are my translations.

# I

## Introduction

### 1) Methodological Framework

This book researches funeral rites in Greek antiquity with the emphasis on laughter/gender relationship in these rites and with the focus on the period from Archaic until the late Hellenistic age. However, I do not disregard relevant data either of the earlier, or of the later periods. Literary, visual and epigraphic sources are going to be analysed in this research.

The research follows the methodological framework of the French Anthropological School of Antiquity that has been developed in the Centre Louis Gernet (EHESS) in Paris. The most important representatives of this school are Jean-Pierre Vernant, Nicole Loraux and Pierre Vidal Naquet, who have contributed greatly to changes in conceptualizing death rituals in antiquity. The centre itself is named after the pioneer of the innovative approach to antiquity, Louis Gernet, who has re-questioned philological methods of the German school and introduced an anthropological approach to the study of antiquity, including original views on Greek funerary rituals. The method is based on the reading of ancient texts from the perspective gained from other ancient texts, constantly making an effort not to impose contemporary values. Greece is compared to other cultures and anthropological fieldwork experience related to Greek, or other cultures, is being regarded useful for the researcher's positioning towards a particular historical and cultural context. Logically, this kind of comparison is not beneficial only for the better understanding of the researched ancient culture, but also vice versa, and the thread of such comparison wriggles throughout the book.

The main characteristics of the anthropology of the ancient world are such that different approaches and methodologies applied in this field, do not exclude each other. The specificity of the approach of the French anthropological school is the structuralist formulation that the condition necessary for an understanding of

some phenomenon is to think about it as a part of the system, the part that mutually depends on all other parts of that system. One of the research fields of the anthropology of antiquity is the anthropology of the dead. The complexity of this field lies in a concept (or concepts) of death that has been re-questioned by Jean-Pierre Vernant, but also in the domain of rituals that allow ideological space to act upon or manipulate the concepts. Nicole Loraux, who has researched lamentation in ancient Greek tragedies, and its relationship to the practices of democracy in Athens, argues that lament, as a less controlled discourse outside the gender-limited area of democratic debate or any other democratic institution such as the theatre, challenges the gender-power distribution in the polis. According to Loraux, the city-state (polis) was aware of the power of lamentation and of the fact that it was very difficult to impose control over it, whereby it introduced a law to regulate and limit it. This measure of controlling the ritual was actually a measure aimed at controlling women.<sup>1</sup>

Vernant comes to the concept of death through the problem of the Other, which he defines in its utmost sense, as otherness of the person who is alive. This otherness is, according to Vernant, embodied in the mask of Gorgo – the mask and non-mask at the same time, that incarnates horror and darkness.<sup>2</sup> Becoming one's double, Gorgo becomes the Other. To this concept of dreadful and horrible death, Vernant opposes another concept, the one that is praised in Greek epic poetry. It is that death is glorious, an ideal of any true hero. I analyse these different views of death that Vernant considers – first separately, and then the relationship between these opposed concepts of the same phenomenon. In particular, I research conceptualization of these concepts in early human cognition (the

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<sup>1</sup> Loraux 1985, 19.

<sup>2</sup> The mask is reduced individuality, it is like a shadow or reflection in the mirror and it is not alive. Thus, one who wears a mask during a masquerade embodies the powers of beyond and these powers control and influence its mimic, gestures and voice.

theory of Olga Freidenberg) on one hand, and on the other I deconstruct the epic narrative of heroic death, concerning particular historical and social contexts in antiquity. Another very important aspect that reveals Greek attitudes towards death is the concept of *kleos* (*glory*) that I approach following the semantic analysis of tombstones carried out by Jesper Svenbro.

Olga Freidenberg, an unjustly neglected Russian theoretician, had a standpoint similar to the French anthropological school, only some 50 years earlier. It is her work and “archaeological” approach that have oriented me thematically. According to her, it is wrong to research religion and folklore within the same conceptual framework and using the same terminology for phenomena that are essentially different in different cultures and in different epochs. Olga Freidenberg examined Antiquity as a series of changes of social constructs, (from the tribes and clans to polis), which were crucial in fostering changes from concrete to abstract thinking and from mythology to folklore. Freidenberg’s theory posits that the ancient world has to be researched comparatively and from the standpoint that could be defined as “theirs”. This is a very ambitious project, and it is still doubtful whether this is possible or not: this basic question is still being debated, and one of the mechanisms in use by academics is to define their “positioning”, in order to clarify their approach. Even if the rhetoric of positioning often turns into stereotypes of political correctness, especially among American authors, Freidenberg’s early ideas remained a challenge for generations of researchers. Olga Freidenberg tried to define and reconstruct the early human thought of Ancient Greek tribes from the time that preceded the period of political organizing, in order to understand some apparently prevailing human practices.<sup>3</sup> She argued that the subject and the object were perceived as undivided in early

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<sup>3</sup> Her argumentation is based on the position that human thought develops from the inner life of people that includes not only rational processes, but also emotions and unconscious. Primeval humans were not able to perceive nature and society separately and they could not differentiate between one and many. They perceived time as separate space while space was perceived as an object.

human thinking (actually conceptual separation of the subject from the object was, according to Freidenberg, very long process, which had not been finished yet in the beginning of Classical antiquity), forming together a concept of nature into which “human” was integrated, blurring the limits between life and death. Thus, the concept of death in early thought would in fact correspond to an aspect of life in our sense of meaning: dead people could have been considered to be both dead and alive, depending on different space division, ritual time, and function in cult practices.<sup>4</sup>

Maria Gimbutas also considered the theme of life and death in her study of gender and prehistory. She related the terrifying mask of Gorgo (according to Vernan, an incarnation of absolute Otherness), which combines elements of death and laughter, with some older masks from Sultana in Romania (mid. fifth millennium). She associated those images with the goddess of death and rebirth. Greek representations of Gorgo-Medusa through the ages display some symbols of regeneration – wings of bees (Gorgo from Rhodos), often lizards and snakes – animals that are “reborn” by the fact that they shed their skin. Starting from the argumentation of M. Gimbutas, I will trace religious changes from the Neolithic Period in which a goddess or goddesses have the central place in the life cycle and forces of nature related to birth, nurturing, growth and death. Concerning death, Maria Gimbutas states: “Many ancient cultures, including those of Old European Neolithic, may have celebrated death because it signalled the impending regeneration of life as well as reunion with the ancestors”.<sup>5</sup> According to Gimbutas, some of the Neolithic cultures survived incursion by Indo-Europeans. However, the Indo-Europeans little by little succeeded in changing religious symbols. Following these ideas of Gimbutas, I will try to trace marginalisation of European Goddess of life cycle and her division into several Greek goddesses (Hekate, Artemis, Demeter, Persephone, Athena, Hera), as well as to re-question the impact of

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<sup>4</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 56.

<sup>5</sup> Gimbutas 2001, 63.

that marginalisation on the change of attitude towards life and death. Particularly interesting in this context will be mythical creatures such as Gorgo and Baubo.

Walter Burkert interprets Greek death through the anthropology of hunting. According to him, one of the crucial instincts, aggression, primarily directed from human to human, has been re-directed towards animals.<sup>6</sup> A hunter must have felt guilty when he killed the animal, but hunting was a source of food and thus was bringing new life. “The bloody ‘act’ was necessary for new life to be able to start again.”<sup>7</sup> And while killing was celebrated as a renewal, the feeling of guilt required a sacred ritual – the ‘comedy of innocence’.<sup>8</sup> According to Burkert, the existence of sacred ritual is directly related to civilised life and order that developed as a result of aggression and the encounter with death.<sup>9</sup> Crucial in the act of killing is the tension of seeing, and especially shedding, blood. However, human tradition in the form of religion does not try to resolve this tension, but rather to heighten it, transforming the feeling of fear and guilt into that of sacredness. In this sense, the function of religion is to maintain peace within a group, but not outside it.<sup>10</sup> I will return to this topic later, in the chapter about *pharmakos*.

Ancient Greek attitudes towards death and life may also be read in the relationship between the living and the dead. I focus on this relationship embodied in the funeral ritual and all festivities devoted to the dead, that is to say, all those periods and places in which, according to ancient Greek belief, communication between

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<sup>6</sup> Very common motive in Greek, as well as in other mythologies, is exchangeability of man and animal. Burkert 1983, 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> This term and the idea about the ritual as “comedy of innocence” Burkert adopts from Kalr Meuli. Burkert, *Ibid.* 16 cf. Meuli 1946, 224-252.

<sup>9</sup> However, Burkert points out that this feeling that, according to him, is the origin of sacrificial ritual, was not the collective feeling in the sense that all people shared it equally.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

the living and the dead was possible. One of the aspects of the relationship between the dead and the living is embodied in the notion of terms *alastôr* and *miastor*. Gernet's interpretation has pointed out that both of these terms bear ambivalent meaning, particularly concerning those who died a violent death and those who killed them, at the same time referring to the vengeful phantom of the victim who died a violent death, and to the murderer who is the object of the pursuit.<sup>11</sup> I connect this interpretation with the theoretical argumentation about *sardonic laughter* and a willing victim given by Veselin Čajkanović<sup>12</sup>. Analysing an example from Serbian oral poetry, in the poem "Smrt cara Uroša" where the mother of her dead son Uroš laughs his grave, Čajkanović introduces the term *magic laughter*, also using a Greek idiom *sardonic laughter* in order to explain its origin. He relates it to the custom in Sardinia where children used to kill their old parents on the edge of the open grave. Those old people were laughing in the moment of death.<sup>13</sup> Čajkanović gives several similar examples from among Greeks, Romans, Germans, Slavs, in order to explain this by belief in the afterlife where the dead in the Underworld have the same power and shape as at the moment of death. Therefore, it was important to die before complete decline of the physical strength, as well as to die laughing, in a good mood. Laughter, as the greatest manifestation of life, represents a sign of willingness to die. So, the act of laughing is a way in which those who are dying show the approval that is

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<sup>11</sup> Gernet 1917, 146, 320.

<sup>12</sup> Veselin Čajkanović is a researcher from the middle of the twentieth century, with progressive ideas, whose impressive work about the religion of Serbs within the Balkan area and in a wider historical context, has not been recognized outside the country. His work displays the richness of the folkloristic material from Serbia that he has accurately analysed in the wider historical and religious context. Čajkanović saw the preciousness of this material in the nature of Serbian Orthodox Christianity that, according to the author, never lost its pre-Christian nature. Čajkanović explains this by the very short time in the Serbian medieval state when Christianity was state religion. Slapšak 1985, 80.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

<sup>13</sup> Timaeus, *In Scholia Platonem*, 396 Bekk.

necessary for such a ritual act. If there were no consent, the whole ritual would be senseless. This is exactly the point at which I relate Gernet's thesis about the vengeful dead to Čajkanović's argument about ritual laughter and a willing death. Čajkanović associates the concept of the good mood of the victim and his/her willing death with the institution of *pharmakoi*, scapegoats sacrificed for the sake of the community.

Alongside the argumentation of Veselin Čajkanović, I put the argumentation of a much more widely recognised and influential theoretician from a different field of interest, the theoretical framework, and a different generation, the philosopher Jacques Derrida, in order to make a connection between common thematic lines of different authors, in this case the interpretation of *pharmakos*. Derrida's interpretation of *pharmakos* is based in the first place on his re-reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* and the questioning of Plato's concept of the oral and written word (that he compares with the *pharmakon*<sup>14</sup>). The philosophy of deconstruction enabled Derrida to research the phenomenon of *pharmakos* (one who takes upon himself all evil of the community and is sacrificed to bring salvation to it), exactly following the main position of deconstruction that he introduced, and that is the interplay and constant shift between the present and the absent, both in the text, as well as in the (ritual) reality.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from *pharmakos*, I also turn my attention to the human sacrifice cases in Greek rituals or myths, in particular sacrifices of youths (human or animal) to Artemis. The sacrifice of human victims to this goddess is interpreted by several modern authors as semiotically close to the female initiation through marriage. This introduces the theme of overlaps between marriage and death rituals. Like death and birth, marriage is a *rite of passage*, as it is formulated in Van Gennep's functional theory. Although it does not include a transition from non-existence to existence or vice

<sup>14</sup> This Greek word means both "medicine" and "poison".

<sup>15</sup> Čajkanović 1994, 2, 103.

versa, marriage is understood as a kind of death. Marriage, especially for women, was the only initiation into the world of adults. Parallels and connections between marriage and funeral ritual are numerous. When someone young died unmarried, especially a girl, she was considered to be married to Hades (a bride of Hades). On the other hand, recent and contemporary ethnographical material from Greece and Serbia (and elsewhere in the Balkan region) proves the existence of the same ritual pattern of funerals with elements of wedding ritual as well as remarkable similarities between some lamentations and songs sung during weddings. I also deal with the relationships between those two rites as well as ritual manifestation of feelings within those rituals, both of joy and of sorrow.

The part of my research which relates to certain parallels in some cultures of the modern and contemporary Balkans follows the approach of the French anthropological school that tries to establish a relationship between researches into Antiquity with contemporary anthropological models.<sup>16</sup> The research is based partly on my personal fieldwork and on recent ethnographic research in Serbia with particular emphasis on the tradition of drinking alcohol after the burial (either on the grave, or in taverns or at the house of the deceased). This tradition is still alive although it provokes disgust, disapproval, and lack of understanding in diversified social and cultural settings.

I combine the results of analysis by Nicole Louraux of lamentation, its meaning and its position in Greece of the fifth century BC, based on her reading of tragedies and about the political and social circumstances of that period, with the contemporary anthropological research by Nadia Seremetakis on ritual laments in Inner Mani (Peloponnesus), where blood-feud existed still during 1980s.<sup>17</sup> According to Seremetakis, the whole funeral ritual, from the prediction of death to the burial and mourning, is a communication between this and the Other world, between the inside and the

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<sup>16</sup> Slapšak 2002, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Louraux 1998, 55.

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outside.<sup>18</sup> Women have a central role in funeral rituals, expressing through lamentation their opinion in public, even pronouncing decisions on vendetta. Through lamentation women give the final, *last word*. The notion of the power of lament was analysed by Nicole Loraux, who stressed that its power should be related to the sorrow that can never be forgotten and that appears in the moment of confrontation with loss, when feelings burst out, turning it into wrath – *menos*, which easily inverts into the wish and the call for revenge.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it was important to have restrictions concerning funeral rites, and to keep silent about events that the *polis* wanted to suppress, causing the oblivion.

According to Fernand Braudel's concept of *long durée*, historical events can be understood only if they are considered within *long historical periods* of development. Braudel associates historical events with the same meaning in order to reach the origin of life and recognise anonymous actor in history.<sup>20</sup> This corresponds to the position of Philippe Ariès, one of the most important 20<sup>th</sup> century researchers into death in the West, that the change of attitude towards death and modifications of funeral ritual always happen so slowly through history that anyone who deals with such a topic should not be afraid of moving easily through centuries, and even skipping them. Ariès further emphasises that the mistakes that might appear in that case are much less dangerous than those that would be manifested if the research into death and funeral were restrained to some short period.<sup>21</sup> Starting from this idea, and the position of Ferdinand Braudel, I combine the argumentation of Nicole Loraux, Gail Holst Warhaft and Nadia Seremetakis that involves research within the historical span from the classical Greek period, through the medieval all the way up to modern times. I also research lament as an integral part of funeral ritual in order to point out from where

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<sup>18</sup> Seremetakis 1991, 64-68.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Braudel 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Ariès 1989, 15.

the lament draws its power. I focus on the events and historical circumstances that were related to the restrictions of lamentation praxis, as well as showing the extent to which the power of lamentation was resistant through centuries. Through examples of restriction of female lamentation by the state, in the periods of wars, I approach recent examples of manipulations of death in war discourse during the Yugoslav wars.

Laughter does not have the same function in different historical and social circumstances. At the same time, laughter might also include several meanings in any specific cultural and historical context. Therefore, it is necessary to research laughter in Antiquity with regard to all those circumstances and ritual contexts in which it is related to death. It is also crucial for this topic to emphasise and recognise the difference between spontaneous and ritual laughter, and to define different types of laughter.

The primary hypothesis is that ritual laughter related to death and funerals is mostly laughter with an apotropaic function. The other type of ritual laughter is, according to S. Halliwell, the laughter that appears in fertility cults. At this point, I also include the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, about regenerative laughter that fosters rebirth and creation, applying it particularly to the festivities of fertility cults, and to the interpretation of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.

According to Ezio Pellizer, the absence of laughter is characteristic only for the state of apathy, and considering this fact, laughter at the moment of death might appear as a reaction to the painful shock. Regarding this fact, interpretation of laughter in funeral rituals and its relation to death, might be enlightened through the psychological perspective, but only to a certain level,<sup>22</sup> and always bearing in mind that laughter on the occasion of death appears in the frame of the ritual and in its particular phases – the

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<sup>22</sup> Pellizer 2000. Namely, psychological functions in general might be regarded only within a certain cultural context, with a notion of social and historical circumstances to which they belong.

funeral feast (emanation of life, since the food is a prerequisite for life), as well as dance and the funeral competition (*agon*), ritual forms that were disappearing already in the classical Greek period, but kept (re)appearing occasionally in particular Balkan cultures, right up to modern times. The question that needs to be answered concerns the purpose of laughter in funeral rites and the motive of “emotional and physical manipulation” that it enables.

The issue of laughter opens up one more avenue for research into the relationship between life and death, and between death and laughter, and that is black humour. The domain of such analysis is related to the context of literature and ritual, i.e. to the festivities of the City Dionysia, and to the origin of theatre – tragedy and comedy. Apart from black humour, another option for approaching the relationship between death and laughter is to make a semantic analysis of the idiom *to die of laughing* that appears in many languages, and might be traced back to a Latin source. Namely, Festus informs us that “Pictor Zeuxis risu mortuus, dum ridet effuse pictam a se anum”.<sup>23</sup>

Anthropological research into funeral ritual poses many questions. Funeral ritual is a form of social practice that has not changed much through history, belonging to the taboo area of death. Women’s subversion in patriarchal societies and influence also turns around liminal areas touching taboos, therefore gender-oriented research should answer some questions about defining these social and cultural areas. Until now there have been many researches dealing with the anthropology of funeral ritual, especially with grief, its expression through lamentation, and its social role. The idea of researching the relationship between laughter and funeral is to cast a new light on the meaning of the whole ritual, and thus illuminate some hitherto unresearched questions in the field.

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<sup>23</sup> “The painter Zeuxus died of laughter, laughing abundantly at the picture of an old woman.” Festus, 228M. s.v. *pictor*.

## 2) Ritual

Among the various theories of ritual that have been developed since the nineteenth century, there is still no homogenous definition upon which scholars of religion would agree.<sup>24</sup> However, this phenomenon has drawn the attention of scholars from different fields such as anthropology, sociology, history, psychology etc.<sup>25</sup> In search of a definition of ritual, I am going to start from the standpoint of Walter Burkert. In his crucial and most famous work devoted to the anthropology of Greek sacrificial ritual and myth – *Homo Necans*, Burkert sets out to find a way of breaking through deep into the nature of religious ritual. Through different definitions of, and differentiated perspectives towards ritual, Burkert offers one of his own. Starting from the definition of ritual as understood by biologists who, according to him, have actually usurped the term commonly used to denote rules of religious behaviour, Burkert outlines this biological definition in order to offer clearer insight into its religious dimension. First of all, Burkert points to “the ritual as a behavioural pattern that has lost its primary function – present in an un-ritualised model – but which persists in a new function, that of

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<sup>24</sup> The problem of defining the ritual arises since there is actually no strict boundary set between religious and secular ritual.

<sup>25</sup> There were several phases or stages in the history of ritual theories. One may start with the pioneer contributions to the research of ritual that were given by 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars of religion, in the first place to E. B. Tylor, who is regarded as a “father of anthropology”. His evolutionist approach understands that different stages of religious development are dependant upon and correspondent to the stages of material development. Almost contemporarily with him lived and worked another anthropologist who focused on contemporary research of world myths and rituals, James George Frazer. Although they inspired a lot of researches into religion and rituals, the actual foundation of the modern study of rituals is related in the first place to Emile Durkheim and Max Weber in the field of sociology, and to Sigmund Freud in the field of psychology.

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communication.”<sup>26</sup> Communication established in ritual may, naturally, provoke a response. Basic characteristics of such an intercommunicational pattern that creates and affirms social interaction are repetition and theatrical exaggeration. These characteristics, together with the simplicity of the information that is transmitted, enable the clarity of the message that is emitted. In accordance with his theory about aggression as one of the crucial and basic inborn instincts that lie in the basement of human religiousness (*homo necans* as *homo religiousus*), Burkert turns his attention to what he understands as a message of aggressive behaviour in some ritual gestures (raising hands, waving branches, kneeling and prostration and even laughter).<sup>27</sup> Although accepting that at least some such forms of behaviour might be traced to the primates, Burkert regards the question about the biological roots of rituals, as forms of communication in society, to be unimportant for understanding religious ritual.

Let us for the moment turn to the sociological and functional perspective of the ritual, first of all in the works of Emile Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown. According to Durkheim, the common action of participating in a ritual is what enables a society to become self-aware through the collective feelings that are re-established at regular intervals.<sup>28</sup> These common feelings and concepts, according

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<sup>26</sup> Burkert 1983, 23. Regarding biological interpretation of ritual, Burkert is referring to the work of Sir Julian Huxley and Konrad Lorenz. See more in Sir Julian Huxley, *Pro. Zool. Soc.*, 1914, 511-515 and Lorenz, *A Discussion or Ritualization of Behaviour in Animals and Man*, 1963, 89 – 127.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 24. Burkert adopts the idea about the origin of laughter in the aggressive display of teeth from Konrad Lorenz, Wien 1970, 268-270. See also Morris 1967, 157, 166. If we accept that idea of ritual laughter as a manifestation of aggressiveness, one possible interpretation of laughter at funerals might be that, apart from sorrow and fear, death provokes the anger (out of helplessness). However, ritual laughter transforms it into a celebration of life, the one to be continued.

<sup>28</sup> Durkheim 1960, 598.

to Radcliffe-Brown, affect and influence each individual.<sup>29</sup> Combining these key points with the psychoanalytical concept of ritual, Burkert interprets religious ritual as a response to traumatic events in life. From this perspective, a religious ritual represents a kind of collective neurosis, whereas individual neuroses are understood as a kind of private religion.<sup>30</sup> However, in his work on *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, Burkert elaborates this idea, emphasising the difference between the compulsive behaviour of private rituals and communal religious ones. Although both originate in the repetition of some action, the crucial discrepancy is the social function that religious ritual bears. Unlike individual rituals, the religious ones are transmitted not only from person to person, but also to future generations.<sup>31</sup>

Taking into consideration all these definitions, Burkert recognises in them a degree of contrast that is not substantial, but more the fact that they refer to different perspectives, pointing out that all of the fore-mentioned concepts are interwoven and not mutually exclusive. “Even if [they sacrificial rituals] exist only because of certain psychological influences, the continuity is surely due to other factors, factors of biological and social selection”.<sup>32</sup>

What does Burkert mean by this? First of all, pointing to the advantageous function of ritual, which is to support the continuity of the community, he underlines the social dimension. This is directly linked to the need to adapt to the group – i.e. those who are not already adapted are exposed to elimination. Then, recognising the learning process and theatricality of ritual that are passed from generation to generation, he points to the pertinence and rigidity of

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<sup>29</sup> Radcliff-Brown 1948, 234.

<sup>30</sup> Although accepting the psychological function in ritual, Burkert is sceptical about “unconscious ideas”. Distorting the psychoanalytical approach, he suggests that those might only be hermeneutic accessories functioning causally. Ibid. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Burkert 1982, 49 -50.

<sup>32</sup> Burkert 1983, 25.

the ritual that are, on one hand, related to the continuity of society, but on the other hand, are also directly connected to the psychological dimension, since certain important feelings – of danger and anxiety – actually do provoke the atmosphere of sacredness essential for the ritual. Recognising factors classified according to their differences in perspective between the sociological and the psychological point of view, Burkert does however recognise their intertwinement, which, from the perspective of historical psychology, actually appears to be inseparable one from another, since each social factor is directly dependent upon and related to the psychological dimension, and vice versa.<sup>33</sup>

Concerning the social dimension of the funerary rite, it represents a contribution to the continuation of society through the reinforcement of the social order.<sup>34</sup> Although death represents a crisis for society, when the crisis is over, the community is reinforced. As Georges Balandier has pointed out discussing the *entropy and restoration of the social system*, all societies are endangered by their own destructive forces, since mechanisms essential for their vitality gradually lose their constructive potential. On the other hand, this vulnerability is not untreatable and the occasion of death and ritual that follows it, is one of the mechanisms that re-establishes disturbed (or violated) social relations through access to the sacred. Or to put it more precisely – after the mourning in which women have the dominant role, the final phase of the ritual proceeds. The funeral feast (on the occasion of which men assume dominance in ritual) leads to the recovery and the re-establishment of relations within the community and with the cult of the dead.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “The psychological and the social thus appear inseparable from each other. The social factor cannot just be superimposed later on the psychological, nor can it be thought to construct it from the outside. It is one of its dimensions just as, inversely, there is a psychological dimension in every social phenomenon.” Vernant 1992, 264.

<sup>34</sup> The same is true of function of rituals of initiation. Balandier 1997, 152.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 150-152.

In Burkert's interpretation, it is possible to see that he starts from the position that the roots and origin of rituals are impossible to recognise.<sup>36</sup> What he does define about ritual is exactly that its practitioners are always unaware of ritual's "deeper meaning", thus accepting the position of Levi-Strauss that the ritual is not born out of ideas, but vice-versa – it is rituals that produce and shape ideas.<sup>37</sup> However, in the opinion of Burkert, although the origin of ritual is impossible to understand and to define, people who practice the ritual understand it – at least intuitively. Further, the ritual is always surrounded by ideas, through images and words. But those ideas, like emotions expressed in ritual, are not the basis of the ritual; they simply accompany it.<sup>38</sup> Together with language, which is, however, younger than the ritual, they represent tradition. But, if the ritual is older than language and religion, which is the position taken by Olga Freidenberg, it does not mean that no ideas were present in the root of a certain ritual. On one hand, it means that the intentions of the first practitioners and the purpose of rituals were not expressed through language in the way we express and try to reconstruct them today. On the other hand, and at this point I would like to turn to Olga Freidenberg, and her position that over time and through the development and change of human thought, many patterns in rituals remained unchanged and were preserved, but they lost their original meaning, and thus new narratives were developed. Hence, clear differentiation and the setting of boundaries between different epochs, between new and old meanings, is possible only formally, since the future and the past overlap, letting different ideas or metaphors exist side by side in folklore. This is why research into ancient Greek funeral ritual or religious practices of any other culture should be carried out for itself, in spite of numerous cross-cultural

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<sup>36</sup> The tradition of searching for some concrete ideas starts in the ritual theory from the nineteenth century with Robertson Smith and Wilhelm Mannhardt, as well as Usener and Geroge Frazer and, concerning Greek ritual in particular, Robert Nilson.

<sup>37</sup> Lévi-Strauss 1979, 102.

<sup>38</sup> Burkert 1983, 29.

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congruencies and similarities, and of course without excluding the cross-checking that should always start from the inside of each religion.<sup>39</sup> This research will deal with certain factors and functions of the funerary rite as part of a set of rituals relating to the dead in the archaic and classical period, and will also include some diachronic Balkan parallels that testify to how this ritual, and some of its functions, have successfully survived as one of many possible, sometimes parallel, traditions. This leads to a form of diachronic analysis and, further on to Fernand Braudel's concept of *long durée*, and the position that it is not possible to understand historical events without researching them within *long historical periods* of development. So, it is necessary to associate the events with the same meaning and from the different time periods, which would enable understanding and interpretation of an anonymous actor in history.<sup>40</sup> Appearing first as an accessory approach important in the anthropological research of antiquity, such inclusion of anthropological and ethnographical studies of rural and modern Greece, as well as some other parts of the Balkans, has opened perspectives in all directions.

Death is an inviolable fact of every life, and when it happens, it brings a crisis that threatens to endanger the social community.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes it appears as a natural death, sometimes it is about wars, diseases, violence etc. Apart from the feeling of the unbearable pain and injustice, there is also a shift between two very strong and contradictory feelings: on one hand it is difficult to realise it and believe that someone is dead, and on the other hand, it reminds us of the precarious and unstable quality of our own lives. In this

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<sup>39</sup> According to Vernant, a comparative approach to the research of religion is possible when focusing on a specific religious area or particular civilization, letting oneself be put into doubt and made to requestion one's own interpretation in a dialogue with specialists of some other religions. See more in Vernant 1996, 267-268.

<sup>40</sup> Braudel 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Berger 1969, 3-28.

crisis provoked by death, ritual practices and beliefs are taking place. Usually it is considered that religion is what helps assimilate the fact of death, helping and supporting the individual and society to get over the crisis.<sup>42</sup> However, in this case and in the long run, it becomes clear that religion in the definition given above is not understood as a certain “system of beliefs held to with ardour and faith”, but as a “commitment to religious faith” in the wider sense of meaning.<sup>43</sup> Considering a ritual praxis such as the funeral ritual in Greece from antiquity to modernity (at least in some internal margins of rural Greece and certain parts of the Balkans), it becomes clear that this ritual, with all the complexity of beliefs related to ungraspable death, exceeds particular types of religiousness. In terms of Levi-Strauss structural interpretation, these rituals and beliefs may be understood as symbolic expressions which do not offer an answer depicting what is real, but try somehow to deal with the unbearable contradictions that people cannot understand.<sup>44</sup>

Funeral ritual survived in spite of the efforts of the state and the Church to control it. Researching these attempts to take over the control of the ritual may reveal the power of those who control and perform it. I will reconstruct the funerary ritual of ancient Greece, map different concepts of death, and analyse the role that the city-state had in the process of transformation of the ritual. Some of the ritual praxis was lost (such as *agon* or dancing), but some of it survived in spite of eager efforts to root it out. The fight for authority over rituals was persistent and, as we shall see, without a real winner all the way up to modern times.

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<sup>42</sup> Berger & Luckmann 1967, 101.

<sup>43</sup> Merriam-Webster s.v. religion.

<sup>44</sup> Danforth 1982, 30; Lévi-Strauss 1967, 30.

### 3) Archaeological approach of Olga Freidenberg

Immortals are mortal, mortals are  
immortal, living their death and dying their  
life.

(Heraklitus, 62)<sup>45</sup>

Who knows but life be that which men call  
death,  
And death what men call life?

(Euripides, *Phrixus. Frag.* 830)

The theoretical starting position of Olga Freidenberg is that the necessary precondition for researching human cognition is the continuous creation of conceptual and contextual frameworks, with a constant effort being made to differentiate different epochs.<sup>46</sup> Her

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<sup>45</sup> *Aqanatoi tqnhtoi, qnhtoi; aqanatoi, zwnte- ton ekeinwn qanaton, ton d j epinwn bion teqnewnte-*.

<sup>46</sup> The theoretical work of Olga Freidenberg has usually been related to that of J. H. Marr, since it shared a very similar scientific faith. However, Olga Freidenberg, being the follower of the German archaeological school and Hermann Usener, did not approve all of Marr's ideas and was not his student in the narrowest sense. Freidenberg and Marr met for the first time during 1924, when most of her ideas had already been established. They both independently used the same method of "archaeological" access to problems – Marr in linguistics, and Freidenberg in the field of folklore and literature. Marr's archaeological (semantic, Japhetodological, genetic, paleontological) approach to linguistics developed from his interests in pre-historical semantics of words and their origins, defined under ethnic or geographical terms. He states that the same form designates different meanings; in the different stadia of development of language and in different contexts, words change their meanings. The theory of Olga Freidenberg has developed from the analysis of the problems of antique literature through the research of semantic and poetic questions. Her starting position is that unchangeable forms exist on the different stadia of society, changing their meanings in different contexts. And more precisely, when the

research in Antiquity, that is the basically immense work of the analysis of literature and folklore through the method of mapping and reconstructing the change of social constructs, from the period of tribes up to the creation of polis, illuminates the change of Greek thought – the transformation from the concrete into abstract thinking. This method of researching Antiquity in the frame of their own point of view, appears today extremely relevant and up-to-date. It is also the method of the representatives of the French School of Anthropology of Antiquity and actually recently there has been much effort to implement such methodology into any research concerning antiquity.

Starting from the earliest human thought in Greek antiquity, Olga Freidenberg argues that in the period of pre-tribal organisation, human cognition functioned by perceiving the subject and the object as an undivided concept. Thus the early cognition process was unifying – people did not perceive themselves to be separated from the others, and it was not possible to draw a clear boundary between life and death.<sup>47</sup> This sameness was not some kind of shapelessness; it was the result of mental equalisation of the diversities of the outer world that happened in the mind. On the other hand, gradually, at the

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same form denotes the same thing in different contexts, this leads to the development of figurative, metaphorical language.

In the period of Marr's recognition, Freidenberg was in a way forced to claim close connections with him. However, her support for Marr and his progressive ideas continued up to the moment when she faced his intolerant nature. Nevertheless, connections with Marr brought about the opportunity to publish her work and to become acknowledged, although not to the extent she deserved. However, staying in his shadow, she was always represented much more as his follower than she actually was. After both his and her deaths, Freidenberg fell into oblivion, as did Marr and his followers.

<sup>47</sup> Her argumentation is based on the position that human thought develops from the inner life of people that includes not only rational processes, but also emotions and the unconscious. Primeval humans were not able to perceive nature and society separately and they could not discern any difference between one and many. They perceived time as a spatial category while space was perceived as an object.

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inner level, the sameness flourished into more and more varieties. According to Freidenberg, archetypes did not exist, since the images were characteristic for their sameness. The types were the same, but only at the semantic level, not on the morphological one, because their shapes could have been different. Different images and phenomena were related in mind and thus the process of concretisation started to take place through metaphors, and the metaphor is, as Freidenberg pinpoints, our term for denoting the characteristics of early cognition processes. Consequently, the metaphor became a precise image that translated what was amorphous and undifferentiated in the inner cognition, to the language of realistic, individual outer phenomena. So, metaphors changed in the different phases of thought and each of them contained both ambiguities of the unique image of the early thought, as well as some of its concrete, later-developed, partial individual characteristics.<sup>48</sup> Through myths and rituals metaphors were shaped, sharpened, and focused, gradually moving away from and forgetting their former meaning.<sup>49</sup> The diversity of changed metaphors has been maintained in the strata of mythology and folklore that have preserved the contradiction.<sup>50</sup> One of them is the theme of this research – the laughter at the funeral.

Researching the nature of early cognition, Olga Freidenberg focuses on the analysis of different metaphors: of death, of birth, of eating, of laughter, of marriage and others. Through these metaphors, Freidenberg explains the semantics of different actions and rituals in reality.<sup>51</sup> Early cognition, according to Freidenberg, did not make

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<sup>48</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 42-44, 53.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>50</sup> The clear differentiation and setting the boundaries between epochs is, according to Freidenberg, possible only formally, since the future and the past overlap, letting different ideas or metaphors to exist side by side in folklore. *Ibid*, 238.

<sup>51</sup> Through the metaphor of eating, for example, Freidenberg explains the semantics of eating, of sacrifice, of resurrection, of death.

any difference between everyday actions and ritual/religious ones, and the ritualistic dimension developed through the conceptualization of everyday-life actions. The periodical nature of festivities appears as a trace of those collective actions that used to be acted out simultaneously.<sup>52</sup>

Freidenberg points out that the attempt to understand different concepts such as death, rebirth or cosmogony through the prism of early thought might only be conditional, since defined as such, these concepts belong to the domain of our cognition that may not be compatible with the early one.<sup>53</sup> Such awareness of the limits of scientific cognition adds to her approach an agnostic slant that puts Freidenberg side by side with a much later generation, the French School of Anthropology of Antiquity that became aware of the limited ability to understand researched Antique phenomena.

#### 4) Early (totemic) concept of death

According to Olga Freidenberg's theory of early human cognition, characteristic in the period of the clan system, nature and human society were perceived as an undivided totality. Likewise, death was conceptualized as being without a defined or definite ending – it was only a temporary disappearing before reappearing, and boundaries between life and death were blurred. The term that Freidenberg uses quite frequently when defining early cognition or its concepts, is totemism and totemic. However, she uses the terms exclusively conditionally, considering that it is only secondary phenomenon that appears as the result of this undifferentiated way of

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<sup>52</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 39.

<sup>53</sup> “Конечно, сами понятия космогонии, смерти, воскресения и т. д. не могут быть отнесены к такой ранней стадии человеческого сознания, но у нас нет возможности быть достаточно точными, поскольку излагать научную работу об этом сознании приходится в наших современных понятийных терминах, с нашей современной семантикой.” Freidenberg 1997, 64.

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thinking.<sup>54</sup> So, Freidenberg does not discuss and argue the mere issue of totemism as an independent phenomenon – a (pre)religious or magic system, or as a way of social differentiation through the process of identifying a group with a certain animal or plant, but, unlike numerous theoreticians who were occupied with this issue (Freud, Durkheim, Max Müller, Jevons, Frazer etc.) she deals, in particular and above all, with early human cognition, arguing that totemism is a secondary phenomenon – a consequence of the cognitive indistinguishableness of subject and object that identifies humans and nature with plants, animals or stones.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, I have decided to use the terms ‘totemic’ and ‘early’ in the present text with the same meaning that Olga Friedenbergr applied to totemic and totem – as the consequence of a unified view of the world, which was characteristic for a pre-tribal system.

So, the position of Olga Freidenberg concerning the early concept of death is as follows: death actually represents an aspect of life. The division of space and time differed from ours and this led to the early perception of the dead, who could have been considered both dead and alive at the same time.<sup>56</sup> The concept of time did not exist, only being understood spatially, so the dead were not considered to be dead. They existed, only in some other place – in their own world.<sup>57</sup> A similar idea of life and death intertwinement, which Olga Freidenberg explained in terms of specificity of early cognition, is also argued by Calum Carmichael in *the Harvard Theological Review*. In his article, Carmichael interprets a number of exhortations in the book of Deuteronomy (such as, for example, the law that forbids consuming an animal that dies naturally) as an effort

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<sup>54</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 36.

<sup>55</sup> The work of Olga Freidenberg was written when the issue of totemism had already arisen and been sceptically debated by Lowie and Boas. The death-blow to the concept of totemism was given by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his work *Le Totémisme aujourd’hui*.

<sup>56</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 56; 1997, 66.

<sup>57</sup> This is essential for understanding the concept of the world of the dead.

to separate life and death clearly. The beliefs of the Israelites, argues Carmichael, did not differ much from the beliefs of other cultures at the time, who did not make a clear distinction between life and death.<sup>58</sup>

But let me go back to Olga Freidenberg and expose her argumentation and explanation of merged life/death concepts. Our contemporary cognition of separate concepts of “death”, “life” and “new death” was in archaic thought merged into one. I have already mentioned that Freidenberg explained the development of early cognition through the process of concretisation through the metaphors – outer and concrete images and phenomena that were once amorphous and impossible to differentiate, started to become, one by one, translated and transformed, gaining their own particular characteristics (first concrete, and then abstract as well). However, concretization did not happen at once – it was a long process in which metaphors were gradually gaining particular characteristics, but not losing unique and common characteristics all at once; the universal and the particular coexisted in these metaphors for some time. The process started with the development of the figurality during the archaic period, coming to an end (separating subject from the object) at the beginning of Classical antiquity.

What does this mean in terms of death and life concepts? The metaphor for “giving birth” is at the same time the metaphor for “death”, “reviving” and consequently for “being born”. This argument is supported by numerous examples from myths, in which parents kill their children in order to give them immortality: Chronos eats his own children; Procne kills her son Itys, throws him into the fire and serves him to her husband Tereus; Tantalus prepares a banquet in which he serves his son to the gods.<sup>59</sup> Pliny the Elder, when describing Gallic and British provinces, mentions that killing a human and eating him was considered to be a pious and very healthy

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<sup>58</sup> Carmichael 1976, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 459, Apollodores, III, 14, 8; Pindar, *Olympian*, I, 50.

act.<sup>60</sup> So, a metaphor inseparable from the concept “life/death/new life” is eating. Eating brings about rebirth. In the frame of the early perception of the world, in which cosmic emanations (the divine), the individual and the community are all made equal, revival affects all is overall and concerns rebirth in totality: reborn is the object that is eaten, reborn is the one who eats and the divinity is reborn. At the same time, eating happens to be the central part of community life, in which the totem (cosmos, society, one and totality) disappears and reappears.<sup>61</sup> In the context of funeral ritual, eating will remain one of its central events.

Olga Freidenberg considers that the semantics of eating coincides, although with slight variants, with the semantics of sacrificing – the killing of the victim and the food offering, its tearing apart (*sparagmos*) and the life-death-rebirth cycle. The burnt victim brings rejuvenation and restoration. The fire, altar and pyre all emanate the principle that brings rebirth, which is recognisable in the funeral pyre. The paradigm of fire as a source of life is present in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, in the episode in which Demeter tried to provide mortal child *Demophoon* with immortality by throwing him into the fire. However, his suspicious mother *Metaneira* seeing what the goddess was doing, understood this as an act of killing, as an act of doing harm to her child and not as an attempt to provide her child with eternal life, and prevented the goddess from doing so:<sup>62</sup>

nukta- de; krupteske puro;- menei hjute dalon  
 laqra filwn gonewn: toi- de; mega qaum j ejetukto,  
 w- proqalh;- teleqeske: qeosisi gar ahta ejvkei

<sup>60</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, XXX, 4.

<sup>61</sup> This central position of the eating act, according to Freidenberg, is not related to accomplishing that the food is the source of life; it has to do with the human effort and work in producing the food. Freidenberg, 1997, 64.

<sup>62</sup> The same motive can be found at Apollodorus, *Library and Epitome*, I, 5, 1.

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter as well as Eleusinian mysteries and other fertility rituals, will be the theme of one of the following chapters about laughter in the rituals.

kaiv ken min poihsen aghrwn t j ajjataton te,  
eij mh; aŕ j ajfradihsin ejuwno- Metaneira  
nukt j epithrh̄sasa quwdeo- ek qalamaoio  
skeyato: kwkusen de; kai; aŕfw plhkato mhrw;  
deisa- j w/ peri; paidi; kai; aŕsqh mega qumw/  
kaiv rj j oŕ ofuromenh epea pteroenta proshuda:  
tekono Demofown, xeinh se puri; eŕi pollw/  
kruptei, ejmoi; de; goon kai; kh̄dea lugra; tiqhsin.  
wŕ fat j oŕduromenh: th- d j aŕie dia qeawn.  
th/ de; colwsamenh kallistefano- Dh̄mh̄thr  
paida filon, ton aŕlpton eŕi; megaroisin eŕikte,  
ceire-- j ajjanath̄sin apo; eŕ qhke pedonde,  
ejxanelousa purov, qumow/ kotesasa mal j aijw-  
kaiv rj j aŕnudi- proseipen ejuwnon Metaneiran:  
nhide- aŕqrp̄oi kai; ajfradmone- ouŕt j ajgaqoio  
aisan epercomenou prognwmenai ouŕte kakoio:  
kai; su; gar ajfradihs̄i th- nhkeston aŕsqh-  
iŕstw gar qewn ofko-, ajmeil̄ikton Stugo- uŕdw,  
ajjanaton ken toi kai; aghraon h̄mata panta  
paida filon poihsa kai; aŕf̄qiton wŕpasa timhn:  
nun d j ouk eŕsq j wŕ ken qanaton kai; khra- ajlukai.

But at night she would hide him like a brand in the heart of the fire, unknown to his dear parents. And it wrought great wonder in these that he grew beyond his age; for he was like the gods face to face. And she would have made him deathless and unageing, had not well-girded Metanera in her heedlessness kept watch by night from her sweet-smelling chamber and spied. But she wailed and smote her two hips, because she feared for her son and was greatly distraught in her heart; so she lamented and uttered winged words: “Deomphon, my son, the strange woman buries you deep in fire and works grief and bitter sorrow for me.” Thus she spoke, mourning. And the bright goddess, lovely-crowned Demeter, heard her, and was wroth with her. So with

her divine hands she snatched from the fire the dear son whom Metaneira had born unhopèd-for in the palace, and cast him from her to the ground; for she was terribly angry in her heart. Forthwith she said to well-girded Metaneira: “Witless are you mortals and dull to foresee your lot, whether of good or evil, that comes upon you. For now in your heedlessness you have wrought folly past healing; for be witness the oath of the gods, the relentless water of Styx I would have made your dear son deathless and unaging all his days and would have bestowed on him everlasting honor, but now he can in no way escape death and the fates.”<sup>63</sup>

This episode is an example of how two different cognitional patterns exist in myth side by side, being associated in the story through the causal thinking. The metaphor of the sacrifice as a source of regeneration will be studied into detail in the chapter about *pharmakos* and about human victims.

Another element from the funeral ritual that will be subjected to the theory of Olga Freidenberg, is *agôn*. Grounding her argumentation in her ideas about the changes of metaphors being parallel to the changes of social constructs, Freidenberg recognises the origin of *agôn* in the hunting phase of society. The totem, understood as the unity of all the cosmic and social world, was presented in the animal (after all, people’s attention was especially oriented toward animals). At this stage, cognition still perceives a merging of cosmos and humanity, although it had also started to include some partial and particular comprehension of the world. This early cognition is recognisable in the act of *sparagmos* – tearing apart and eating the raw meat of the animal. Further, in the agricultural stage, the tearing of the animal was replaced by tearing apart and eating bread. The feast that developed during the clan system is the result of transformation of ritual killing and the eating

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<sup>63</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 239-261. Greek text and English translation by Hugh G. Evelyn - White. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

of raw meat, while the banquet wine appears as a substitute for blood. Thus, in the feast lies embedded an early concept that understands food as a totem – the god has died and is being reborn through the act of eating.<sup>64</sup>

Crucial for the hunting phase (that succeeded agrarian one) of society is that in this period people, for the first time, used their hands in order to confront, fight, and catch the animal. This central moment of fighting with bare hands is directly linked to the act of eating, thus leading to the equalisation of metaphors of hunting in the meaning of fighting, with the metaphor of eating.<sup>65</sup> Both eating and defeating bring salvation from death. The winner is the one who stays alive. From such defeat that is equal with death, an image of the enemy develops and that is the reason why many funeral reliefs from antiquity represent battles. However, in the case of early cognition, the individual person is not recognisable; the winner and the beaten are perceived as one and the same person, represented in the image of the mask of the cosmic totem.<sup>66</sup>

In the agrarian phase of society, the former solar totem is replaced by a vegetative one and the time is now perceived through the cyclic concept. Understood as a spatial category, the year dies through the agonal act to be replaced by the New Year. This contest between the old and new totem plays a crucial role in the formation of rituals and myths. On the agrarian stage, cosmogonic unity disappears from perception, but persists undivided in myths and rituals. While metaphorical interpretation is being changed and shaped exactly through myths and rituals, bringing the change of meaning and of perception of the world, the parallel and opposite process also took place. Myths and rituals were preserving original metaphors, albeit forgetting their meanings and keeping them hidden.

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<sup>64</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 156.

<sup>65</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 64, 65.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

In the hunting society, laughter and tears appear in cosmogonic unity, incarnating the appearance and the disappearance of the totem. Only due to the change from concrete to abstract thinking, mourning and laughing elements in the funeral rite did become separate and tears started to denote death, while laughter started to denote life. However some comic interruptions were continuously included in the acts of mourning even in the later periods. This means that even after the changes in early thought were completed, some patterns remained preserved in myths and rituals, and developed into new narratives, although their original meaning was lost. Starting from the position of Olga Freidenberg regarding early cognition, I will try to define some of the points where previously undivided concepts of death and life became separated in funeral ritual, which started to exclude laughter. Above all, it is the convivial part of funeral ritual, the feast – *perideipnon*, accompanied by drinking wine, that had to intensify the festive mood. In the *Iliad*, Odysseus expresses the absurdity of the feasting atmosphere as part of a funeral, but only because it was then difficult wartime, and not because such an atmosphere was perceived as something inappropriate for a funeral.<sup>67</sup> The same mood of joy and laughter was obligatory in other festivities of the dead.

Adopting the approach of Olga Freidenberg, I will research not only the funeral ritual itself, but also the folkloristic material that might have preserved forgotten beliefs about, and attitudes towards, death and life. I will also analyse phenomena characteristic of funeral rites but in some other contexts, such as, for example, lamentation in fertility cults (of the dying gods) that are related to joy and laughter as well as to lamentation at the weddings. Focusing on the example of the fertility cults, I will interpret festivities and rituals concerning the cults of Demeter, Adonis, and Dionysus in the light of Olga Freidenberg's theory of cognition, mapping the idea of the *double*, based on an active-passive comprehension of the world, which connects death with the life-giving laughter and fertility.

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<sup>67</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XIX, 225.

Additionally, I will analyse traces of the early cognition of the world in myths and mythic figures such as twin gods (e.g. Castor and Pollux) incarnating the concept of *double* (two in totemic thought expresses plurality), crucial for the earliest understanding of life and death. The same idea of *double* is embodied in the mask that was put on the face of the dead, representing both the dead person himself and his *double*. The mask also appears in the theatre, where we come across another concept of death. Considering the wider Balkan context and possible historic continuation, the methodology of Olga Freidenberg will be applied to folklore material from the Serbian tradition where we find doubles, “jednodanci” or “jednomesečici” – brothers born either on the same day or in the same month. Moreover, deciphering the remains of early thought might prove to be helpful in illuminating the meaning of the laughter elements in funerary rituals.

## 5) Folklore and anthropology: Balkan continuities

### *a) Laughter and Death*

Although the early, totemic worldview and perception of life/death has disappeared with the development of abstract and causal thinking, old concepts have not been completely forgotten. The patterns of early cognition not only appear in certain stages of funeral ritual, but also in the folkloristic material. In this chapter, I want to look for the “forgotten” patterns of the totemic concept of death, particularly as understood by Olga Freidenberg, in the folkloristic material from Greek antiquity and compare it to recent folkloristic research in some parts of the Balkans. I will analyse the metaphor of killing that brings about rebirth, comparing the myth about Alcestis with the games characteristic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which participants simulate funeral ritual (or one of its parts). At the end of the game, the “dead” person turns out to be alive, and all burst into loud laughter.

Let me start with Euripides' *Alcestis*: Admetus, the husband of Alcestis, finds out that he is going to die, unless he finds someone to die instead of him. He is refused by all of his friends and his parents (according to the aforementioned pattern: the old die in order to improve their children's life), so only his wife is left to fulfil his wish. And she did. Alcestis agrees to die instead of Admetus. Immediately after her death, in the period of deep mourning, Heracles comes for a visit. Not wanting to be a bad host, Admetus offers Heracles great hospitality. The guest feasts abundantly – drinking the best pure wine, eating voraciously and singing. However, when Heracles realizes that it is Admetus' wife, Alcestis, who recently died, he decides to get her back from the Underworld as a sign of gratitude to the host who did not deprive him of an ample feast and joy, even at such a painful time.<sup>68</sup> So the feasting, eating, abundant drinking and joy appear as the cause and the precondition for rebirth. This is the same meaning that the funeral feast bears embodying the metaphor of eating equated with rebirth.

Another illustrative episode is the one that follows. Heracles brings to Admetus a new bride, of course veiled, whom he has just won at a public contest of wrestling and boxing. As revealed by the end of the play, the woman he has won at the contest against Death, and brought as a present for Admetus, is Alcestis herself.<sup>69</sup> We come across another obvious metaphor of rebirth – *agon* as a confrontation and a contest with death, namely, in the hunting phase of society, the metaphor of fight becomes equated with the metaphor of eating.<sup>70</sup> The beaten contestant symbolises death, while the winner is the one who gains new life.

The myth about Admetus and Alcestis, reduced to its simplest form, reveals the pattern of exchange of death for life. The same pattern is preserved both in the plot and in the genre of this

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<sup>68</sup> Euripides, *Alcestis*, 840-861.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 1030-1335.

<sup>70</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 64, 65.

drama that is very close to a satyr play, in the sense that it reveals the coexistence of the serious and “parodic” side of life, which is characteristic of the early thought.

At this point I would like to introduce the concept of hubristic/parodic as understood by Olga Freidenberg, which I am going to discuss further in the chapter about laughter. This concept corresponds in a way to Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque, and refers to the early worldview that inseparably embodied “serious” and “unserious” aspects, of course without the dichotomy that we ascribe to it. The main difference between Bakhtin’s and Freidenberg’s approaches is that Freidenberg is interested in early cognition and the mental functioning that produces such a worldview, while Bakhtin maps and analyses such a worldview in the context of Medieval culture and festivals. Euripides’ *Alcestis*, its plot and characters, especially the character of Heracles, reveal such a “double”, “serious-unserious” worldview.<sup>71</sup> So, the play itself is extremely interesting, not only for its plot, but also structurally, because it reveals the forgotten pattern of life-death unity.

Another type of folkloristic material to which I shall now turn, refers to more recent times, and to the area of the Balkans, in particular to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here, I will refer to the games with the motifs of funeral and death, witnessed in abundant ethnographic material from the twentieth century.<sup>72</sup> Such a type of game is classified as an imitative ritual game.<sup>73</sup> There are several different types of “funeral games”. Usually masked or unmasked players (actors), comically act out some part(s) of the funeral ritual, usually parodying certain ritual stages. Depending on what is focused upon, the game is named: “Celivati mrca”, “Mrtvog Turčina”, “Živog mrca”, “Dizanje mrtvaca”.<sup>74</sup> Variations of the

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<sup>71</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 332.

<sup>72</sup> See Dopuđa 1953, 1966. Obradović 1966, Vrčević 1968, Zečević 1966.

<sup>73</sup> Krel 2004, 89.

<sup>74</sup> “Kissing the corpse“, “Dead Turk“, “Alive corpse“, “Raising the corpse”.

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game are numerous, but all are actually formed around the same matrix – someone is pretending to be dead, the other participants in the game believing him and imitating the proper funeral ritual (or some stage of it), but suddenly it turns out that the “dead” is actually alive: he jumps about trying to catch those who surround him, and all together they burst out laughing loudly. Obviously, the game reveals a forgotten and very old cognitive pattern according to which death functions as a condition for new life. Therefore, the game is not understood as some kind of “evocation” of death and it does not provoke fear or any unpleasant feeling.<sup>75</sup> Obviously, laughter that is provoked in such a ritual game functions as a reinforcement of the forces of life.<sup>76</sup> This old, forgotten, but, as it is obvious, still preserved notion of death as a condition for life-reinforcement is recognisable in the dream folklore of the certain parts of contemporary Balkans. Namely, both in nowadays Serbia and Greece, some people believe that dreaming of somebody’s death is a good omen that lengthens the life of one who appears dead in the dream.

### ***b) The Double***

Another phenomenon addressed in this chapter is the concept of *the double*. Early cognitive processes, which, at the very beginning enabled people to perceive the world as a totality, started to differentiate surroundings through the process of metaphorisation. Separating the subject from the object was a long process that had not been finished yet at the beginning of antiquity. At first it was shaped by perceiving the subject in the categories of the object and as the transfer of the object to the subject. The perception of the object did not change a lot – it became concrete, but the subject was

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<sup>75</sup> When I was a kid I used to play similarly with my brother, although we had never seen such a game. He was pretending to be dead and I was pretending to believe him and I mourned him. At once, he would jump and we burst into laughter. When mother saw us playing such a game she was shocked and she forbade us to play like this.

<sup>76</sup> Obradović 1966, 372.

still in the process of transformation. For a long time the antique cognition perceived itself as non-I. Subjective was perceived only through the objective.<sup>77</sup>

Early relations between people were based on the idea of total equality and sameness among them. All people were perceived like twins – doubles. In the pre-religious period no one was outstanding, nobody was distinguished among others and no one ruled over the others. The only dependence existed in relation to nature. In early cognition everything was melted into one – human undividable from nature, god, and totem. And, at that stage of thought, everything in nature, every human being and every object possessed its double.<sup>78</sup> The traces of this early, totemic concept of the double might be recognized in the Homeric concept of *menos*, some kind of life-revealing double – “genius”, that is related to everything – alive and not alive (e.g. to fire, Sun, river, beasts). Furthermore, *menos* is also a state of the soul, i.e. its double in the meaning of “rage, strength, spirit”. “Strength-soul” can speak, it is being addressed as a human and it is actually the equivalent of a person.<sup>79</sup> However, this should be understood only conditionally, because, this “equivalent of person” is not a double of the individual, but actually the double of life, or more precisely – the double of the totem of death and life, that are always indivisible and perplexing.<sup>80</sup> On the linguistic level *menos* is the double of *meros* that denotes “part”, “what falls in one’s part of life, destiny”. To the same etymological complex (\*mer-, \*mor-, \*mr-) belong also words that

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<sup>77</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 225. This is also clear from the characteristic of ancient Greek literature that does not reveal self-reflection. The writer is always and exclusively just “the mouth” of the divine, and everything that is created is the work of the divine. “The self” and “I” do not exist.

<sup>78</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 49-50.

<sup>79</sup> Such concept of soul does not correspond to modern or Platonic concept of soul as a mental force that is independent from the physical body.

<sup>80</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 46.

denote death.<sup>81</sup> This linguistic relation between the two mentioned words does not have to do with etymology, although Freidenberg also suggests that. What is important here is that the same root is used for the word denoting “destiny” and “death” – death appears in relation, and, as a condition of life.<sup>82</sup> So, early, totemic cognition imagines fate as a double of the soul – *meros* as *menos*. It is the destiny of the totem – sacrificial animal that is split, its pieces given to everyone, in the same way in which destiny is shared, given to everyone.<sup>83</sup>

I have already mentioned that the perception of the world in the early cognition happens in the following way: after the period when everything was perceived as one totality, comes the differentiation between one and two, while two refers to many. However, in order to explain this concept of the double that reveals the connection between death and life in pre-religious Greek thought, Freidenberg starts from the long preserved concepts in Roman religion – the one of genius, Lares and Penates, that, as she argues, is not exclusively Roman phenomenon, but something that is also traceable to Greek religious and ritual praxis. However, let me start with the Roman times: Lares are Roman household gods protecting family and house. The term Lares is most commonly used for the translation of the Greek words *hero* and *daemon*.<sup>84</sup> This points to the conclusion that “the hero” (“dead god”) of Greeks is very close to Roman Lares. It is interesting that Lares do not have singular, which actually corresponds to the concept of early heroes, i.e. dead souls

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<sup>81</sup> Greek word for mortals – *brotoi* and immortals *ambrotoi*. Slavic words for death, e.g. Serbian *smrt*, and Russian *смерть*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>83</sup> The clear symbolism is recognized in the Serbian custom of preparation of the so called *česnica*, round bread for Christmas. Its name reveals that it is being split into parts (this semantically coincides with the mentioned word *meros* because *čest* means part, but also fate and luck). The bread is torn by everyone, and is believed to bear magical powers and that it should bring fertility and luck to the land and people.

<sup>84</sup> Dion Chrysostom, 4, 14. Cicero, *Dio Cassius*, 56, 41.

that never appear individually. Usually there are two Lares and a genius, and this corresponds to the aspect of double as plural. Metaphorically, this reflects the aspect of twins/double. Lares are connected with the underworld – with the Earth’s womb, and in that sense they appear as agricultural divinities that represent the home/domestic demons. Each Roman house had a little hollow in the wall of the atrium where food and wine were sacrificed to Lares.<sup>85</sup> Lares appear both as “domestic demons” who help, support, and protect the house, but also they belong to domain of the dark and they always receive first bites of food and flowers (these are all metaphors of Earth). They are closely related to Penates who also appear always in pair and who are represented as two young sitting men. Even Lares and Penates are often equalled to each other, being equalled also to the souls of dead. So, the Roman tradition of the double is obvious and lead us indirectly to deeper Greek times and early concept of heroes, basically and inevitably, the dead who originally appeared in plural. A cult of the founder of the tribe, city, of the ancestor in the pre-tribal system is the cult of the dead. At the time when causality did not exist as a part of cognitional processes, the concept of a hero cult had been not yet grounded in genealogies. The heroes were imagined as the dead behaving the same as humans – eating, giving birth, living, become divine after their death. Apart from eating (food was one of the main sacrifices in the hero as well as of the dead cult), the main motivation of the life of a hero was to fight. Roles of the heroes were embodied in the symbolism of the fighter: the enemy and the friend, the defeated and the winner. Roles constantly shifted, just as with life and death.

The same semantic of the double – enemy/friend, life/death, and winner/defeated might be traced in folkloristic material in the concepts of twins. The Greek paradigm are *Dioskuroi*. Although twins, born by the same mother (Leda) – Pollux is a son of Zeus,

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<sup>85</sup> This small temple with four sides had cosmic meaning of space with all four sides of the world. The same semantic is recognizable in contemporary kitchen cupboards, where some precious family things are kept. Freidenberg 1987, 54.

while Castor is a son of the mortal Tindareus.<sup>86</sup> Dioskuroi were exceptionally beautiful, strong and they never separated from each other, sharing all good and evil. However, in the conflict with Aphariades, Castor got killed. When his brother was dying, Pollux asked his divine father Zeus to enable him to die as well. He requested to share the destiny with his brother. But, Zeus offered him to choose – either to live eternally on Olympus, with immortals, or to spend time with his brother half of it in the underworld, and half of the time in Olympus. Pollux accepted second offer and since then, brothers spent every day together – one day in the underworld and the second in the golden heaven.<sup>87</sup> Their inseparable existence reveals the indivisible unity of dying and rebirth each day, in the multiplicity – the double of the existence. This inseparability of twins dominates their individual destinies. The twin brothers are the double of each other, and again, they are not the double of the individuals, but the double of the totem of life and death, constantly dying and being reborn, mirroring the constant shift of life and death.

Let us move now to the folklore of another Balkan region. In the Serbian Dictionary (published in the first half of the nineteenth century) that is not only an important lexicographic work (a base for the development of Serbo-Croatian vernacular) of the time, but also an excellent and exceptional folkloristic source, Vuk Karadžić gives a definition of *jednomesečici* (“brothers of the same parents, born in the same month”)<sup>88</sup> that reveals the same idea of the inseparable concept of double, corresponding to some elements of the myth about Castor and Pollux. Namely, the definition that describes the necessary rituals in the life of twins is as follows:

Kad se jedno od *jednomjesečica* ženi ili udaje onda drugo ne smije biti kod kuće (nego ga pošlju kud u drugo selo), niti smije jesti od onijeh jela što se gotove

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<sup>86</sup> Scholia *Odysseae*, XI, 298.

<sup>87</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 298.

<sup>88</sup> Completely the same refers to *jednodanci* (“brothers born on the same day, twins”).

za svadbu. Kad jedno umre, onda metnu u puto jednu nogu mrtvoga a drugu živoga, pa onda ono živo dozove kakvoga momka (s kojim se pazi) i reče mu: „Da si mi po Bogu brat, pusti me (ili odriješi me).“ Onda onaj otvori puto i pusti ga, i to su poslije pobratimi.

When one of the brothers gets married, the other should not be at home. This one is sent to another village and he is not allowed to eat anything of the food prepared for the wedding feast. When one of the brothers dies, one leg of the living one and the other of the dead one is put into the fetter. Then, the living one calls a friend and tells him: “Be my brother by God and let me go (release me).” The friend opens the fetter and releases him. After that they become brothers.<sup>89</sup>

This definition reveals the inseparable relationship between brothers — their duplication. The importance of the meal as a ritual sequence in the rites of passage, and the symbolism of the meal as interiorisation and a metaphor of death and rebirth, becomes clear from the ban on the presence at the brother’s wedding.<sup>90</sup> If this ritual were not performed, the mere fact that the brothers (or twins) share the common meal would result in the whole ritual, in this case the wedding is of the same importance for both of them. Their sameness, the doubleness that they reveal, is the reflection of the old pattern according to which the universe was total and unique, while the concept of time did not exist yet and was understood spatially. According to the early cognition, everything was the same, inseparable, and when the one became separated from the other (many), for a long time they stayed essentially undivided and equal.

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<sup>89</sup> Karadžić 1969a, s.v. *jednomjesečici*. My translation.

<sup>90</sup> At this point I am recalling Freidenberg's interpretation of the metaphor of eating as a condition for rebirth, but also the theory of Arnold Van Gennep about the rites of passage (birth, marriage and funeral) as transition rituals that move individuals from one social status to another in a three-phased schema of separation, segregation through liminal period and incorporation.

The rituals related to doubles (*jednomesečiči*) point to the stadium of cognition when metaphors started to differentiate, still keeping both unique images and concrete individual characteristics.<sup>91</sup> Thus, *jednomesečiči* are understood more as inseparable and unique beings than as individuals. The reason for this lies in the construction of the idea of the double in the early worldview. The double is not a mere equivalent and duplication, but a totem of life and death, in the constant dynamics of change.<sup>92</sup> The fact that brothers or sisters are born in the same month makes them strongly bonded and identified with each other, and every time their destinies diverge, special rituals are necessary to provide for their separation. So, when one of them marries or dies, a ritual has to be performed. These brothers and sisters understood as a double to each other, which means as a life-duplication to each other (some kind of soul, or genius), have to be ritually released, because it is believed that everything that happens to one of them actually affects the life of the other one. The one who is dying, for example, represents a totem of life that is in decline.

Another point related to *jednomesečiči* and *jednodanci* corresponds to the demand of Pollux to follow his brother even to death, in order to prevent their separation. According to the ritual of “releasing” by brother blood, who, becoming another brother, the living double (“living spirit”), helps the twin to separate from death and the brother/sister who has died, one could conclude that the shared, identical destiny is what is normally expected. However, performing adequate ritual enables duplication with someone else. So the dying brother is exchanged by the living “substitute”, the dying totem is replaced by the living one empowering the forces of life and death.

Apart from such archaic reflection of the idea of the double in the Serbian folklore, I would like to mention another example, this

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<sup>91</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 42-44.

<sup>92</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 46.

time a traditional tale that was also written down by Vuk Karadžić. The tale, under the title *Justice and Injustice* is the following:<sup>93</sup>

Once upon a time there was a king who had two sons, one good and just and the other very canny and unjust. When their father died, they decided to bet on what is better – justice or injustice. First, they bet for money. They bet three times, and every time the good one lost, because every time it was the devil himself who, disguised in a monk, involved to resolve their dispute. Finally, the good one agreed to bet for a wager of his own eyes. He lost once more. Then, blinded and crippled, he hid in the forest, near a spring. Suddenly, *Vile* came to the spring and he heard them saying that the water from the well is good and healing, and that it can help and heal anyone.<sup>94</sup> When the good brother heard them, he reached the water, washed his eyes and healed himself. He also took water from the well and brought it to the king's daughter who was on a death bed. Having saved her life, he married her. When his brother heard what happened, he decided to take out his own eyes and to go to the spring in order to get the luck his brother got. But *Vile*, realizing that the king's daughter could have been healed only if somebody saw and heard them, searched the forest. Seeing a canny brother in the forest, they caught him and tore him apart.

Although the story reveals the patterns of causal thinking, which is a later inscription, the tale in its deeper strata reveals a constant shift and inseparability of the double – everything has its double – brothers, good and bad, the devil and monk, life and death. And although causality is obvious, and although the story is moral, promoting the good and justice, it actually reveals that justice and

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<sup>93</sup> The original title of the story is “*Pravda i krivda*”, Karadžić 1969b, 16 (129-131).

<sup>94</sup> *Vile* are mythical creatures, beautiful and young girls that live far from people, freely, around springs, in the sky, mountains or caves. Sometimes they can turn into some animals (hawk, swan, wolf, serpent) or they appear as half animals (with the legs of horse, donkey, goat) that points to their role as a demons of nature that became later connected to the souls of death ancestors. Kulišić, Petrović, Pantelić 1998, s.v. *vila*.

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injustice coexist side by side, as a double of each other, and that they are not actually always clear-cut or divided. This is the reflection of early cognition and of the abandoned notions of dualities (as we perceive them today) that used to be melted into a unique concept. Just as there was no separated idea about life and death, the evil and good were merging, and clear boundaries were not possible to be drawn. The mechanism of duplication is obvious – the destinies of two brothers shift – when one wins the other loses. This conflict (*agon*) finally gets resolved with the episode of the blinding. The blinded (good) brother actually does what is “improper”, spying on Vile on the well. Namely, these beautiful creatures were believed to be beneficial and good to people, unless someone offended them or spied on them. The parallel of this episode exists in Greek mythology. For the same reason of spying and even approaching them disguised into a woman, Pentheus was torn apart and eaten by Maenads in their bacchante madness.<sup>95</sup> So, the Serbian tale, just as Euripides’ drama *Bacchae*, reveals the motive of rage and the tearing apart of the one who has violated the cult. In Euripides’ drama there is only the character of Pentheus, while in the Serbian story, the roles are divided, duplicated and only the second brother is punished. And while the first brother gets rewarded after being blinded – he is healed and gets married to the king’s daughter – the other is torn apart and the story ends with this. However, as we have seen, according to Olga Freidenberg, such tearing apart – *sparagmos* of sacrificial animal, or round bread in numerous rituals, or, in these two narratives – even human, actually represents the metaphor of killing and eating, which brings rebirth. Life and death are shifting and merging, always announcing each other and leading from one to the other. In the early cognition it was believed that the living and the dead shared the same, one and only world, constantly dying and

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<sup>95</sup> The myth in this Euripides’ drama is grounded on the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysos, and actually everything that happened was a punishment for Pentheus rejection of the foundation of Dionysos’ cult. So, he was punished for the violation towards a god.

being reborn, at the same time existing on both (and at the same time one and the same) planes.<sup>96</sup>

## 6) Crossing the boundaries: Was the Greek thought ever “savage”?

The conclusion to the first chapter, which is the theoretical introduction to my work, is an effort to position the work of Olga Freidenberg in the context of a theoretical milieu of ethnological and anthropological research interested in rethinking and conceptualizing different, early modes of thought. On one hand, I shall turn my attention to unavoidable and capital theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss about *la pensée sauvage*. On the other hand, I shall also draw on the theory of Olga Freidenberg. However, this time, my aim is not to use her theory as a tool for rereading death and different phases of ritual that surrounds it, but to read critically two different theories – one by Olga Freidenberg and the other by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Although the two theorists were contemporaries at least for some parts of their lives (Olga Freidenberg was born twenty years earlier and died in 1950) they probably never heard about each other. The works of Lévi-Strauss, dealing with the subject of early thought were published in the years close to Freidenberg’s death. I would claim that quite certainly Lévi-Strauss did not read Olga Freidenberg. First of all, she wrote in “non-international”, Russian language, and was connected to the intellectual circles around N. J. Marr, whose members all shared the same unfair destiny. Namely, the history of linguistics moved in diverse direction from the school around Marr and this led to the complete “forgetting” of the whole group of researchers. Unlike structuralism, that spread from linguistics to the other non-linguistic disciplines (actually it was the merit of Lévi-Strauss to introduce structuralism from linguistics into the field of ethnology and anthropology, founding structural

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<sup>96</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 56.

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anthropology), Marrism borrowed non-linguistic methods and used it in the language science. The result was that in the field of linguistics, this method did not prove to be fruitful. However, in the context of literature, folklore, religion and culture studies, it evolved into a new approach towards the problem of human thinking and its functioning as a system, offering profound and original insights about the development of human thought. The work of Olga Freidenberg gave astonishing results, illuminating not only early Greek religion and folklore, but arguing that Greek literature developed directly from the folklore, without any other models and paradigms (as for example Roman literature developed from the Greek one), being grounded in early forms of human (pre-tribal) thought.<sup>97</sup> What Freidenberg actually did was that she proved in a way what Lévi - Strauss had in mind when claiming that modern thought is certainly not more sophisticated than the “savage” one. She succeeded in refuting the exceptional status that the European, Western thought has attributed to itself. However, the standpoints of Freidenberg and Lévi-Strauss, their argumentation and methodology were, as I shall demonstrate, quite different.

What is the common point that I have aimed to stress? Namely, in the preface to his book *Le Totémisme aujourd’hui*, the starting position of Lévi-Strauss argumentation against the existence of totemism is that theories about it appeared as a specific type of exorcism establishing sharp boundaries from the religious practices and thought on which they are grounded, and which Christian thought regarded unacceptable. He understood that as an effort of the Western civilization to free itself from “primitive” and “archaic” stadium of its development.<sup>98</sup> So, as the response to the theories formulated, among others, by Lucien Lévy- Bruhl, Lévi-Strauss focused on proving that the “primitive” modes of thought are neither radically different (prelogical, prerational) nor fundamentally more archaic than our own “civilized” ways of thinking. Indeed, Lévi-

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<sup>97</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Lévi-Strauss 1979, 9.

Strauss argumentation is aimed at presenting these “primitive” modes of thought not so much as the attribute of the so-called primitive societies radically different from ours, but just as the aspect of the way in which all human beings think. What he does is that he proves that human thought has functioned according to the same structural system of associations at all times. Human cognition has always been and still is based on analogical thought and is independent of social context. The only difference is that on earlier stadia, cognition operated using physical analogies, which have been later replaced by abstractions.<sup>99</sup> So, theorizing within the methodological framework of structuralism, which he borrowed from linguistics, but also very often turning to mathematics and psychology, Lévi-Strauss understood myths as an embodiment of different codes. The interpretation of certain codes leads to another stratum. However, and this is crucial for structuralism, form and content are always mutually conditioned and inseparable. The naming of things and first perceptions appear through the process of differentiation and of associations and everything is perceivable through the binary pairs.<sup>100</sup>

Unlike him, Olga Freidenberg differentiates early human cognition, characteristic for the pre-tribal system and establishes the relationship between human cognition and the social context. Freidenberg even claims that early cognition functioned so radically differently from our abstract thinking, that our intellectual apparatus is not able to grasp completely the early mechanisms of thought. Our cognition functions on the binaries that did not exist in early thought. The main thesis of Olga Freidenberg is that all folkloristic genres and topics are variable paraphrases of one and the same semantic meaning that has a fixed morphology. Early thought perceives the world as identicalness and repentance. However, images have different morphology from the very beginning and even when they

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<sup>99</sup> Lévi-Strauss 1979, 120.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

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are semantically identical, they have different structure.<sup>101</sup> But nonetheless, there is one similarity between the earliest intellectual functioning of pre-abstract thinking and the later one, claims Freidenberg – early people, the same as people of later epochs, always reacted and acted spontaneously. The perception of the world around us has always been, and still is, absolutely conditioned biologically and socially. And, just as we are not aware of how our cognition functions today and are rarely aware that it is conditioned, early people could perceive the world around them just directly, through visual and outer impressions.

How does this happen? The first cognitive categories were visual. But, what should not be forgotten, claims Freidenberg, is that the process of observing is after all a mental process, whereby it lacks objectivity – eye pupils are not sufficient for seeing; what we need is a brain response, and brain participates actively. So mental processes, just as sensations, are subjective and such is their concretization. In that context, the early cognition created myths spontaneously as the only reality, not an alternative one. So – visual images, several metaphors, the undivided spatial-time categories, undivided relationship between human and nature and the absence of formal-logic causality – that is the early myth and the early thought.<sup>102</sup>

So, in her immense theoretical work about the antique literature and genres, Olga Freidenberg researched not only early Greek thought, but also folklore and religious elements that, as she proved, were constitutive elements of this literature. According to her analysis, the antique literature, though very often it does not deal with religious thematic, is actually very much grounded and interrelated with the religious context in which and out of which it appeared. As a matter of fact, the ancient Greek literature represents a direct inheritance of the former phase of thought and of religion. It inherits and guards the metaphors created in the former epoch and in

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<sup>101</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 38-39.

the abandoned way of human cognition. So, whether we call this early thought savage or totemic, or simply early, Olga Freidenberg has shown, drawing on immense material from the Greek literature, that this thought functioned differently (not more simply or in any way worse) than ours, not having, as Claude Lévi-Strauss claims, the same structure and not being based on the dichotomies. Secondly, the traces of early thought are semantic patterns completely different from ours. These traces are still recognizable in the antique literature, myths, and both in the antique, and in contemporary folklore. So, although Freidenberg proved that early thought functioned differently from ours, she succeeded in challenging the narcissism of the European culture, demonstrating that the culture of the European “cradle” has emerged from religious behaviour and that it embodies “primitive” religion, the religion of the unrestrained and sacrificial rituals in which it was usual, for example, to kill sacrificial animals, and even humans. In this way, she was also among the first who questioned the ideas of European colonization and the ideas of exceptional Greek past – religion, folklore and culture, which, as she demonstrated, did not very much differ from other cultures on the same stadium.<sup>103</sup> Although Olga Freidenberg has been never been recognised and known by the researchers in the French and the English speaking areas, who although almost half a century after her, arrived at the same theoretical positions, she was a pioneer in a multidisciplinary approach to antiquity, including and combining the research of anthropology, folklore, ethnology, and literature. Integrating different disciplines is actually a method that is likely to be expected in the wide field of antiquity due to diversity of disciplines that research into the classics covers. However, the official abandoning of the strict and rigid division into single and separated disciplines, and rejecting the tradition of the German School of Philology happened officially not before the 1960s by the French Anthropological school of Antiquity. The methodologies

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<sup>103</sup> However, Olga Freidenberg claims that Greek culture is exceptional exactly in the way in which it transformed religious behaviour into literary forms, which was afterwards taken over by other cultures. *Ibid*, 324.

advocated by the school, as I have mentioned, include immediate ethnographic experience as invaluable help in interpreting antiquity. As it is obvious from the work of Olga Freidenberg, research into antiquity might also be helpful and illuminating for contemporary anthropological researches. A combination of synchronic and diachronic approach to religion and folklore and, in this case, a minute analysis of literature and preserved folkloristic patterns, opens up the possibilities for a different perspective to the contemporary research into ritual, folklore and their transformation.



## II

# Greek Concepts of Death and Underworld Geography

### 1) Relations with the dead: How the living speak about the dead or how the dead speak about the living

The mirror..., lends itself to problematizing the entire realm of seeing and being seen: the eye, first of all, with the shaft of light emanating from it in the act of seeing, just like that other eye, the glowing pupil that is the sun, the star that both sees everything and makes everything visible when it beats down with its rays and is the source of life; second, the real being with its double, its reflection, and its painted or sculptured image; than again, individual identity, the return back of oneself and the projection in the other as well as erotic fascination; and finally, the fusion in the face of the beloved in whom one searches for oneself and loses oneself, as with a mirror, in beauty and death.

J.-P. Vernant, *In the Mirror of Medusa*, 143

“Because the dead remain part of our mental and emotional lives long after they cease to dwell beside us physically, it is easy to assume that they are simply carrying on their existence elsewhere and might occasionally come back to visit us. From that assumption arise a variety of hopes and fears.”<sup>1</sup> Other factors that are directly related to the belief in the afterlife existence should be sought in a

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<sup>1</sup> Johnston 1999, viii.

complex mosaic of attitudes and concepts of life and death that are directly linked to the beliefs and rituals referring to the communication and power of the dead. Sarah Johnston even suggests that the picture of afterlife and the image of the dead reflect the same fears, desires, angers, the same requirements (e.g. food) as those of the living, and might be seen as a mere reflection of earthly life. In the utmost case, every detail of beliefs referring to the dead and to death might potentially be used as a source that reveals something about the living (after all, beliefs in gods and the supernatural always do so), but the question that is difficult to answer is the root of the beliefs and rituals that do not always originate in the same periods and precisely this implies the difficulty in their reading and interpretation. Johnston suggests that belief in the anger of the dead and their ability to punish the living is a way of preserving the concept of theodicy.<sup>2</sup> Even if this is true, it is worth mentioning that even today, among atheists and people who are distanced from traditional rituals and beliefs, it is often possible to recognize respect and some sort of fear from the dead. Related to this concept is the custom of never speaking ill of the dead, which might reflect a fear of the dead, but also the idea about reciprocal exchange – talking good should provide benevolent protection by omnipresent and omniscient dead.

Changed or forgotten concepts about death and the dead, as well as trying to understand people and circumstances in which certain beliefs were created and appreciated, are also significant issues. These may be relevant for clarifying “mirror-like” reflections concerning the existence both in this world and the underworld. And really, it is not only that mirror, through centuries, had a central role in the religious beliefs about death, being regarded as a passage to the Underworld; a mirror might also symbolize our own attempts at understanding death and beliefs related to it. Like an image in the mirror it turns back to us only our own, this world's projection,

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, viii.

unable to speak for itself anything but what we project, or rather, what people have been projecting in it for centuries.

Thus, the only way to approach the concept of funerary ideology is from the universe of the living to that of the dead. Starting from the society as a whole, from its institutions, practices and beliefs we try to crystallize the Greek concept of death and its impact on the society, researching in the first place the way in which the concept of death is provided with social permanence and continuous reproduction. Defining funerary ideology and integrating death into the mental universe and institutional practices appear to be essential for affirming a human group.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the acculturation of death is not a mere reduplication of the society of the living, but a complicated strategy of adapting death to the requirements of collective life.<sup>4</sup>

## 2) The World of the dead

### *a) The Underworld geography and everyday life*

It is possible to reconstruct the ancient Greek ideas of life beyond, its geography, rules and routine on the grounds of numerous sources (literary, epigraphic as well as iconographic) from different periods (from Homeric times to Hellenism). What emerges from the analysis of the available material is the picture that is abundant, detailed, but very often highly contradictory and lacking consistency. This fluidity is not dependent on different periods, wherefore it is impossible to harmonize it with the sources of different date. The picture offered by the oldest text was actually never refuted later,

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<sup>3</sup> Vernant compares this kind of collective self positioning towards the death to the affirmation of the group in the context of culture, as “civilised” one in relation to everything that is different – chaos, wild, or barbarian. Vernant 1992, 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

though it might have been supplemented according to the needs of the new established ideologies (e.g. Orphism).

The Greek underworld was positioned beyond the borders of the world of the living. Its master was the god Hades (in non-Attic literature, Hades was the name of the Underworld). Inhabited by the souls of the dead, this world was under the protection of numerous divinities (such as Demeter and Persephone, Dionysus and Hephaestus), who, related to both domains of this and the world beyond, often move between them. The residence of the dead was also closely related to the natural sources – of water, fire, corps, minerals etc.<sup>5</sup> From the fifth century, Hades also appears under the name of *Plouto* (Wealth-Giver). It was exactly during the festivals devoted to fertility gods that the annual commemorations of the dead were held, when, as it was believed, the dead souls visited the world of the living. But let me leave this topic now, and turn to the landscape of the residence of the dead.

Homer places the entrance into the Underworld beyond the stream of *Ókeanos*, the river-like sea that flows all around the World.<sup>6</sup> Right by the entrance is the grove of the goddess Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, who became the wife of Hades, after he had violently abducted her. Her place is full of barren weeping willows and poplars.<sup>7</sup> The house of Hades is dark and dank, and placed even deeper down from its entrance.<sup>8</sup> Because of the eternal dark that rules there, it is also called *Erebos*.<sup>9</sup> Relatedness to the absence of any light is the placement of this world at the utmost West, beyond the gates of Helios.<sup>10</sup> Mythical habitations, placed at

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<sup>5</sup> Slapšak 2005, 228.

<sup>6</sup> In the later sources, such as Plato's *Phaedon*, this is also Underworld river. Plato, *Phaedon*, 112 E – 113 C.

<sup>7</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, X, 508-509.

<sup>8</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, X, 512.

<sup>9</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XVI, 327.

<sup>10</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XXIV, 12.

the “borders of the night” are settled by Kymerans and Hesperidae, the daughters of Night (*Êspera*), guarded by the serpent Ladon.<sup>11</sup> Other settlers of the Hades residing near the entrance and before the fields of asphodels are *Oneiroi* – Dreams.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from the House of Hades, there was another residence in the far West, called *Êlusion* inhabited only by the heroes with special privileges.<sup>13</sup> This beautiful place is always refreshed by the mild wind,<sup>14</sup> and it is so fertile and abundant that fruits grow there three times a year.<sup>15</sup> Although it is placed in the underworld, this wonderful space with red roses and golden pomegranates is completely opposite from Hades, with the dead spending their time there in joy and happiness, with the music of kithara, racing and participating in different contests.<sup>16</sup> The motive of *Êlusion* and of the Islands of the Blessed was used as the starting-point of the mystical speculations.<sup>17</sup> So, the idea related to such an Underworld is associated with the ideal of a good and fair life in this world.<sup>18</sup> The region of Another mythical place of the Underworld was *Thartaros*, a crevice under the Hades. First of all, this used to be a prison where Zeus threw all those who would oppose him.<sup>19</sup> It was also a place where guilty people were sent.<sup>20</sup> Later it was simply identified with the house of Hades.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Appolonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, IV, 1396 Scholia.

<sup>12</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XXIV, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, IV 167 sqq. Another meritorious mortal that reached the Elysium was Menelaus. Homer, *Odyssey*, IV 561 sqq.

<sup>14</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, IV, 561.

<sup>15</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days* 167 sqq.

<sup>16</sup> Pindar, *Fragmenta* 129.

<sup>17</sup> Quirini 2005, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Pindar, *Odes*, II, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Homer, *Illiad*, VIII 13.

<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 526 b-c.

<sup>21</sup> Vergilius, *Aeneid*, VI, 448.

However, the most famous residence of the dead was the gloomy, dark and damp house of Hades. Several rivers flow through this place – the Acheron, the Periphlegiton and the Kokytus, that is a branch of the river Styx.<sup>22</sup> All those names point to their relatedness to the dreadfulness of death and dark, or to the mourning ritual: *Stux* means the river of piercing chill or the river of hatred, *Puriflegethôn* – river of fire, *Kôkutos* – the river of lamenting and wailing (*kôkuô* – lament over the dead). In addition to belonging to the netherworld geography, some of those rivers are real toponyms of this world. The Styx is a river in Arcadia,<sup>23</sup> while the Acheron and the Kokytos flow through Thesprotia.<sup>24</sup> The picture of the underworld that I have just offered is a reconstruction according to *Nekuia* – the so-called eleventh book of the *Odyssey* which describes Odysseus' descent to Hades. The same image of the Underworld geography also appears in Pausanias' description of paintings of the Knidian Lesche.<sup>25</sup> The ferryman Charon transports the dead across the river Acheron. It was a one-way journey, paid by the money that was placed in the mouth of the deceased. No one could enter Charon's boat without a proper funeral.<sup>26</sup> In his dialog *Kataplous*, Lucian mentions the presence of Moira in the boat of Charon. *Moirai* are usually imagined as three sisters – *Klôta* (Spinner), *Lachêsa* (Destiny), and *Atropos* (Inexorable), who, present from the moment of one's birth, take decisions about his/her future destiny, including the moment of one's

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<sup>22</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, X, 514.

<sup>23</sup> Pausanias, VIII, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, VI, 1, 5; I, 17; V, 14. The relation of real toponyms and Underworld creature is common. Particularly interesting in that sense are names of the areas the habitat of which resembles the one of the world Beyond – either as damp, deserted, dark, or with some very warm and poisonous streams. Such is for example Chimaera in Lycia, the area with permanent gas vents.

<sup>25</sup> Pausanias, X, 28.

<sup>26</sup> Pausanias, X, 28, Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 183 etc., Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* VI, 18.

death.<sup>27</sup> Even Zeus could not influence and change their decisions.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes they were believed to be daughters of *Anangé* (Necessity).<sup>29</sup>

At the entrance of the Underworld, the dead were welcomed by the horrible “dogs of Hades”.<sup>30</sup> This dog-like monster called *Kerberos*,<sup>31</sup> sometimes has serpent-like characteristics.<sup>32</sup> *Kerberos* was usually described as a three-headed monster,<sup>33</sup> but sometimes the number of heads would increased to fifty,<sup>34</sup> or even to a hundred.<sup>35</sup> His barking provokes fear among the dead, and he devours those who try to leave.<sup>36</sup> Aristophanes mentions a cheating technique of turning away *Kerberos*’ attention with cake.<sup>37</sup> Even Hades is sometimes imagined as the one who devours corpses.<sup>38</sup> However, there were also other monsters in the Hades’ kingdom. Similar to *Kerberos* is his sister *Chimaira*, also the many-headed monster, a combination of snake, goat and lion, who eats the dead.<sup>39</sup> Another animal-like monster and sister of *Kerberos* is *Sphinx* – half lion, half women, who attracts the dead with her beautiful voice and

<sup>27</sup> Homer, *Iliad* XVI, 431; XX, 127; XXII, 303; XXIV 209. *Odyssey* IX, 207.

<sup>28</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XVI, 431.

<sup>29</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 617.

<sup>30</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VIII, 368.

<sup>31</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 70.

<sup>32</sup> In his description of Laconia, Pausania actually offers the explanation that no dog of Hades could exist and if though that there was not such a place and go out on the land surface. It was, states Pausania, dreadful, poison snake from whose bite was mortal. Pausanias, III, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Pausanias, III, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 312.

<sup>35</sup> Horatius, *Carimina*, II 13, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 767 - 773.

<sup>37</sup> Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 601.

<sup>38</sup> Sophocles, *Electra*, 542 fr.

<sup>39</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI, 179.

then attacks them.<sup>40</sup> The dead could also come across other monsters. The brother of *Kerberos* called *Ortéros* lives at the edge of the Ocean, at the island Eritrea.<sup>41</sup> Another anthropomorphic monster called *Eurynomos* whose residence was the Underworld, used to appear near the navel of the World, in Delphi. This black creature, covered with fox skin, was believed to devour human remains.<sup>42</sup> Other voracious creatures were the dogs of the goddess Hekate. Except for dogs, there were also snakes, and other snakelike creatures. Gorgo is the Underworld creature with the snakes instead of hair that turns to stone everyone who looks at her.<sup>43</sup>

The geography of the Underworld entrances is rich, and mythical evidence points to several places where the Earth could open its doors to the house of Hades. The place where Hades abducted Persephone is placed in Eleusina,<sup>44</sup> Kolonos,<sup>45</sup> Lerna,<sup>46</sup> Crete,<sup>47</sup> Ena<sup>48</sup> or Syracuse.<sup>49</sup>

The entrance to the Underworld is opened not to the people in their corporeality as they lived in this world, but only to their soul (*psychê/eidôlon*) or shadow (*skia*).<sup>50</sup> This soul/shadow is the double of the deceased, which without any corporeality, only resembles its pair. It is only a shadow that, according to Homer, in the moment of

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<sup>40</sup> Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 810.

<sup>41</sup> Apollodorus, II, 5, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Pausanias, XXVIII, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*. XI 633. Sometimes there are mentioned three Gorgones living behind the Ocean. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 275.

<sup>44</sup> Pausanias, I, 38, 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Orphica Carmina*, 1590, 1593.

<sup>46</sup> Pausanias, II, 36, 7.

<sup>47</sup> *Scholia to Aeschilum*; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 914.

<sup>48</sup> Diodorus V, 3,3.

<sup>49</sup> Diodorus V, 4,2.

<sup>50</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI.

death abandons the body through the mouth<sup>51</sup> or the wound<sup>52</sup> of the deceased. Such a concept of a soul differs from Platonic, or modern concepts of the soul as an inner mental force, independent from the physical body.<sup>53</sup> It is just an illusion that, like some kind of smoke, inhabits the Underworld. So, although physiological functions end with death, the dead keep some physical characteristics: they keep the same appearance, but it is impossible to touch or hug them.<sup>54</sup> Sometimes, their existence in the world Beyond have the same characteristics as in the life on Earth.<sup>55</sup>

Hades is often presented as a place full of suffering and wailing. The dead Achilles, i.e. his *psuchê* cries over his fate in the Underworld, wishing rather to be the servant on the Earth than ruler of the Underworld.<sup>56</sup> The dead lose their memory, which they may regain after drinking blood. When Odysseus devoted sacrifices to the dead, at the entrance of the Hades, all the souls rushed under the sacrificial pit to drink blood.<sup>57</sup> However, after such refreshment, not only do they regain memory, but also become omniscient. The famous passage from the *Iliad* is when Odysseus' mother, Antikleia, informs her son about what happened at Ithaca, after his leave.<sup>58</sup> The souls are also deprived of food and drink, wherefore they are always considered hungry and thirsty.<sup>59</sup> It is also necessary to mention the so-called underworld food. Whoever consumes it once becomes

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<sup>51</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, IX, 409.

<sup>52</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XIV, 518.

<sup>53</sup> Kolozova 2000, 120.

<sup>54</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* XI 205-207, 218-222.

<sup>55</sup> The mythical hunters Heracles and Orion keep hunting in the Underworld. Pausanias, X, 29. The suitors of Penelope talking about their deeds in the living world. Homer, *Odyssey*, XXIV 125-190.

<sup>56</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* XI 488-492. The soul of Agamemnon feels sorrow. Homer, *Odyssey* XXIV, 21.

<sup>57</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI 35-39.

<sup>58</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI 180-188.

<sup>59</sup> Lucian, *On funerals*, 9; Homer, *Odyssey*, VI, 201.

related forever to the world of the dead. That is what happened to Persephone when she ate a pomegranate.<sup>60</sup> Lucian also mentions the consummation of golden roots.<sup>61</sup>

But let me return to the voyage of the souls into their eternal residence. Souls of the dead are often represented on the vase images as miniatures with wings. This image is also confirmed in Homer, since Penelope's dead suitors are described as bats.<sup>62</sup> At the entrance, the dead are welcomed usually by *Kêres* (*kêr* – fate). Appearing either in groups or single, these flying creatures with wings, attack the bodies of the wounded and the dead, drinking their blood, the stains of which remain on their cloths.<sup>63</sup> In later tradition, *Kêres* became identified with the dead and their name was used during the festival of Anthesteria when the souls of the dead were thrown out of the houses. Related to these horrifying creatures are also *Erinyes*, black creatures with wings that have snakes instead of hair,<sup>64</sup> smelling awfully and with some horrible corporeal juice flowing from their eyes.<sup>65</sup> Still in Homer they appear as torturers, usually responsible for culprits. Similar to them are also *Arpui* the name of which is usually related with *arpazô* – to grab. Usually there are three of them. Unlike ordinary escort of the dead, these creatures may sometimes grab even those who are still alive.<sup>66</sup> The abductors of the dead are also Sirens, imagined as half-women, half-birds, who could enchant sailors with their mortal song.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 393.

<sup>61</sup> Lucian, *On funerals*, 19.

<sup>62</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XXIV, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, III 45; XVIII, 538.

<sup>64</sup> Euripides, *Orestes*, 316.

<sup>65</sup> Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 51. Both *Kêres* and *Erinyes* were sometimes believed to be revengeful souls of the dead. Hesychius, *Scholia in Homerum, Iliad VIII*, 70.

<sup>66</sup> The abduction of Pindareus daughters see Homer, *Odyssey XX*, 66.

<sup>67</sup> Homer, *Odyssey XII*, 39-46.

Another guide in the house of Hades was also *Thanatos*, who, as all other creatures with this function, appears winged, often in the company of his brother *Hypnos*.<sup>68</sup> They live together in *Tartaros*, where no sunlight can reach them.<sup>69</sup> *Thanatos* cuts the hair of the deceased, which is a way of relating the dead with the Underworld.<sup>70</sup> He is the only god that does not receive sacrifices, who does not have altars and to whom no songs are dedicated.<sup>71</sup>

Another *psuchopompos* or *psuchagogos* (“one who takes the souls”) to the Underworld is *Hermes*. From the fifth century he is represented in sandals with small wings. He uses a magic stick, with which he enchants people into eternal dream.<sup>72</sup>

Specific is the situation concerning afterlife ideology in terms of punishments for the deeds done in this world. Namely, although there is no such linear or complete ideology that may be reconstructed, there is a category of mythical sinners who offended gods stepping over the border posed between mortals and immortals. One of such mythical *hubristai* is *Tityos* who, being punished for attacking *Leto*, lies forever on the ground while two vultures devour his liver.<sup>73</sup> Another sinner is *Tantalus* who cheated the gods serving them his own son for dinner. Therefore he suffers from eternal hunger and thirst. Although standing in the water under the fruitful tree, he cannot drink since the water and fruits recede every time he tries to snatch at them.<sup>74</sup> The punishment of *Sisyphus* is to push on huge stone along a slope. However, the stone rolls down each time

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<sup>68</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 212.

<sup>69</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 755.

<sup>70</sup> Euripides, *Alcestis*, 76.

<sup>71</sup> Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 1392.

<sup>72</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV 1. Special group of the Underworld daemons are those who were believed to attack children such as *Mormô* or *Gelô*.

<sup>73</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 576-582.

<sup>74</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 582-590.

he reaches the peak and he repeats this action eternally.<sup>75</sup> Except from Homer, other sources offer similar examples.<sup>76</sup> The younger the sources are, the more numerous are examples of those who are punished. The common characteristic of all those punishments is that they, the same as afterlife existence, are everlasting, and exactly this never-ending repetition is what makes them even worse and unbearable.

Of course, the ideas about the afterlife retribution developed hand in hand with the flowering of mystery cults such as the Orphic or Eleusinian one. The practitioners believed that taking part in these mysteries and living according to the proscribed standards could have provided them with better afterlife than the one described in Homer.<sup>77</sup> In Plato's *Gorgias* and *Republic* we are informed that those who are not initiated have to carry water in a bottomless sieve.<sup>78</sup> The most extreme among mystical ideologies was the Orphic one. Namely, the practitioners of the Orphism believed that the existence in Elysium was possible only after three incarnations in which a person would live according to very strict rules of this mystical ideology.<sup>79</sup> The very strong expansion of Orphism and other mysticism influenced the later descriptions of the Underworld.

Nevertheless, sources such as Plato, or those from the Hellenistic period and later (Plutarch and Lucian) – offer descriptions of the afterlife expiations and the judges that control it (e.g. Minos, Rhadamanthus, Aecus) who send the guilty ones to the

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<sup>75</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 590-601.

<sup>76</sup> For the punishment of Ixion see Pindar, *The Pythian Odes*, II 39 sqq. For Thamyris see Pausanias, X, 30, 8.

<sup>77</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 480; Pindar 137 Snell-Mahler; Sophocles, *Fragments*, 837 Radt.

<sup>78</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 493 b; *Republic* 363 c-e. The same was the punishment of Danaian fifty daughters who killed their cousins, their potential bridegrooms. *Scholia in Euripidem*, Hekaba 886.

<sup>79</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 617 b sqq.

Tartarus.<sup>80</sup> The paradigm of a mortal who, due to an error and premature death, visited the underworld and came back to the world of living, retelling his impressions is Er, the story of whom is retold in the Plato's *Republic*. Er saw how those who are guilty were sent to the deep dark areas of the world beyond, while the souls of the blessed flew to the Heaven.<sup>81</sup> Similar is the fragment of Plutarch in which Aridaeus describes the fate of the souls that, coming to the underworld, are subjected to different judges, depending on the gravity of their sins. The supreme judge is Adrasteia, while her executors are *Poinê* – Punishment, *Dikê* – Justice, *Erinua*.<sup>82</sup> Lucian adds to those creatures *Phoboi* (*phobos* – fear) and *alastores* (torturers) who torment sinners, frauds, denounciators etc.<sup>83</sup>

This presentation of the underworld geography and its life points to the conclusion that it is impossible to offer a homogenous and stable image of it. The image of the Homeric underworld is full of immaterial, ungraspable souls that spend their gloomy afterlife without punishment or reward, in thirst and hunger (satisfied only occasionally, in the moments of receiving sacrifices) in the damp and dark rooms of Hades. In time the idea of the afterlife expiation developed, so as the idea that life itself could bring blessed afterlife existence.

### ***b) The Cult of the Dead***

In order to reconstruct beliefs about the cult of the dead we may start with Homeric epics. However, the picture that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* offer is not homogenous, reflecting different strata of Greek religion, some of which precede those of the Homeric epoch. Transmitting contradictory ideas about the fate of the dead and their souls in the afterlife, those epics sometimes reflect the idea that death

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<sup>80</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 526 b-c; *Phaedo*, 249 a, 108 b.

<sup>81</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 614 a-c.

<sup>82</sup> Plutarch, *De sera numine vindicanda*, 563 F sqq.

<sup>83</sup> Lucian, *On funerals*, *Menippus*.

was a definite ending, while other times they describe rituals that directly refer to the opposite conclusions about the afterlife existence.

Patroklos' words of farewell from Achilles follow the description about his funeral illustrating the idea about death as a definite ending and final departure from this world:

**kaiv moi doꝛ thn ceir«oj ofuromai, ouj gar ełt«  
aułti-  
nisomai eł« Aitdao, ephn me puroꝛ- lelachte.**

Give me now your hand I pray you, for when you have  
once given me my dues of fire,  
never shall I again come forth out of the house of  
Hades.<sup>84</sup>

Juxtaposed to this is the description of Patroklos' luxurious and abundant funeral. Apart from the sheep, pigs, goats, dogs and oxen, honey, wine, and oil, Achilles also sacrifices his hair and twelve Trojans for his dead friend.<sup>85</sup> After the climax of these human sacrifices, the anger of Achilles is being replaced by sorrow and he invites Achaeans to organize the funeral contest – *agon* for Patroklos.<sup>86</sup> This contest and all other mentioned sacrifices (though not in such abundance and with the exception of the human victims,

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<sup>84</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 75-6. Greek and English text edited by Samuel Butler;  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>85</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 20. There are several more evidences in Homer that point to the existence of the cult of the dead. In the ninth book of *Odyssey*, *Odyssey* in the land of Cicones invites the souls of his dead friends to travel with him, since at home empty graves are waiting for them. (*Odyssey*, IX, 64-76). The existence of soul after the death is evidenced also by the Erynies who punish everyone who gave false oath. Their punishment does not happen through judgment, but through the torturing of own conscience (*Iliad*, IX, 260).

<sup>86</sup> The *agon* represents archaic part of the funeral ritual, which was in post Homeric epoch translated in the cult of the heroes or some gods. *Agon* after as a part of funeral ritual appears in Homer in *Iliad*, XXIII, 630, *Odyssey* XXIV, 85 – 87.

which are in the later cult substituted with the hair), appear in later Greek chthonic cult. In terms of the function of such offerings devoted to the dead or the gods, which is to appease and make happy those who receive them, we may state that the dead belonged to a cult similar to those of chthonic gods or heroes.

Yet Erwin Rohde pointed out that numerous verses from Homer stand in the absolute contradiction to the indication of beliefs that the funeral of Patroklos actually illustrates.<sup>87</sup> The reason for such contradictions is possible to find in the nature of oral poetry, which has always been created through a longer period of time. Thus the fragment referring to Patroklos' funeral might actually be of an earlier origin – when such funerals were still usual. The other hypothesis is that the funeral ritual still survived in the Homeric period in such form, though the meaning of such praxis had been forgotten. This situation might be, in the utmost case, comparable to the contemporary attitudes towards certain remaining parts of the funeral ritual, whose practitioners still adhere to some of this praxis, often completely unaware of its earlier meaning.

Regarding the archaeological material, the epitaphs on the funerary monuments in particular, it seems that in the archaic period the cult of the dead was less present than in the former and later periods. And while the archaic death (except that of heroes) is always dreadful and antithetical to joy, the funerary inscriptions that refer to the later periods reveal a different tone. Namely epitaphs of the later periods often have the greeting *chaire, chairete*.<sup>88</sup> Although a simple salutation, this word was not empty of specific meaning, but was felt to include the connotation of joy and wish for someone to be well. This is how dead Orestes farewells Pylades:

cair j : ouj gar hmin eḗsti touto, soiv ge mhn:  
oil gar qanonte- carmatwn thtwmeqa.

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<sup>87</sup> Rohde 1921, 25.

<sup>88</sup> With the same words Achilles twice addresses dead Patroklos. Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 19-20; 179-180.

Farewell, be happy, my beloved friend; we cannot, but  
you may;  
for we, the dead, are robbed of happiness.<sup>89</sup>

This greeting is usually referred to the living, to the gods, or to heroised dead. However, after the archaic period, *chaire*, *chairete* becomes usual in addressing of the all dead.<sup>90</sup>

The bulk of evidence that the cult of the dead existed in archaic, classical and Hellenistic periods derives from the funeral ritual itself, as well as the ritual praxis after the funeral in the regular feasts and the common festivities devoted to the dead, as well as through the most unusual and, at the same time, the most tangible and direct manifestation of communication with the dead – in the wide spread praxis of necromancy. The assumption that the dead are omniscient and aware of what takes place on Earth is clear from the Homeric underworld description. Anticlea, Odysseus mother, talks to him about Penelope's fidelity, about his son Telemachos and about Odysseus' father.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Agamemnon, although bitter in relation to all women because of Clytemnestra's betrayal and murder, and despite advising Odysseus never to trust women, still praises Penelope's virtues, saying that she will not betray him.<sup>92</sup> The question that imposes itself is how the dead could see the future. The explanation should be sought in the old inability of people to divide temporal and spatial categories. Namely, before the category of time developed, it was perceived spatially – events from “the past” or “the future” were imagined to be going on somewhere else. The underworld was the place that polled knowledge and understanding of everything on Earth. The roots of the future lay in the past, or in terms of spatial categories the future is planned and created in the

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<sup>89</sup> Euripides, *Orestes*, 1082-1083. Greek text ed. Gilbert Murray, English translation E. P. Coleridge, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu> See also Astydamos II, *TrGF* F 5.

<sup>90</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, 209.

<sup>91</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* XI, 180-223.

<sup>92</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* XI, 444.

place in which the dead dwell, the same place where *Moirai*, the three sisters determining human's fate, reside (*Klôta*, *Lachêsa*, *Atropa*).<sup>93</sup>

Much evidence testifies to the existence of this specific kind of divination based on communicating with the dead. The prime site for the necromancy in the Greek world was the grave which was believed to be the home of the dead.<sup>94</sup> The existence and importance of tomb sites as a place for communication with the ghosts is confirmed in literary sources and by numerous curse tablets (*katadesmoi*) and voodoo dolls (*kolossoi*) found in the graves.<sup>95</sup> Sites convenient for communication with the dead were also battlefields.<sup>96</sup> Since the fifth century BC, very popular were also oracles of the dead, so called *nekuomantêiona* (prophecy-places of the dead) and the most famous were Acheron in Thesprotia, Heracleia Pontica on the coast of the Black Sea and Tainaron. The particular places in Heracleia and Tainaron were natural caves, while oracles in Acheron were probably situated next to the lakes, which corresponds to the belief that the entrance to the underworld was place at some natural source.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XVI, 431; XX, 127; XXII, 303; XXIV 209. *Odyssey*, IX, 207.

<sup>94</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 81 b-d and Hippocrates 1.38. See discussions in Garland 1985, 12 and Ogden 2004 3-16.

<sup>95</sup> Ogden 2004, 3.

<sup>96</sup> For curse tables on battlefields see Audollent 1904, 22-27, Jordan 1985, 193. Also Homer, *Odyssey* XI 38-41 and Lucian, *Menippus* 10.

<sup>97</sup> At the end of the fifth century appear *psuchomantêion*. At Plutarch we come across the term *psuchopompêion* – “sending place of ghosts”. In the fifth century AD at Hesychius appear another term, probably old Laconian one – *nekuôr(i)on* “seeing-place of the dead) and variant with “r” *nekromantêion*.

More about communication with the dead and necromancy in antiquity see more in Johnston 1999, Ogden 2001 and Bremer 2002.

### c) *The hero cult*

The existence of the hero cult is related to the belief in the existence of demigods or heroes, the class of beings that is something in-between gods and mortal men. However, the word hero appears with a twofold meaning. A hero used to denote a deceased person praised for some great deeds and who, after death, became honoured and praised on the grave for his supernatural powers and influence on the living. Apart from this, heroes were brave warriors whose fame was sung by *aedoi*. According to sources, traces of the hero cult appear from the post-Homeric time, from the tenth century, but they became widespread from the last quarter of the eighth century. Since then, there was a practice of rediscovering old graves and attributing them to famous epic heroes.<sup>98</sup> It increasingly spread out in the Hellenistic time. Actually, from the fourth century, it frequently occurred that mourners presented ordinary dead as heroes, and impact of this was reducing the importance of many heroes who used to be important before.<sup>99</sup>

Numerous parallels can be drawn between the cult of the dead and the cult of the hero. Joint elements of those cults were sacrificing animals, food and libation, but also preparation of bath, weeping and lamentation.<sup>100</sup> Once a year, there was a festivity when a hero received offerings for the dead – *enagismata*. The similarity of rituals and offerings devoted to the dead and to the heroes poses the question of the relation between those two cults and whether it is possible that the cult of the hero was developed out of the cult of the dead. This thesis that the hero cult is a continuation of the cult of the dead (although not ordinary ones, but those of appreciated and powerful noblemen) was very energetically defended by Martin

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<sup>98</sup> This was the case of the Grave of the Seven against Thebes. Pausanias, I, 39, 2, Plutarch, *Theseus*, 29. The grave of Amphion at Thebes: Burkert 203 cf. 5

<sup>99</sup> OCD s.v. *hero*.

<sup>100</sup> Diodorus Siculus 16. 20. 6 cf. Burkert 1985, 205.

Nilsson.<sup>101</sup> Even in tragedies we find the traces of such ideas. The dead people as divine appear in Euripides *Phoenician Women*:

**toi- gar qanousi crh; ton ouj teqnhkota  
tima;- didonta cqonion eujsebein qeon.**

For those who are not dead must reverence  
the god below by paying honor to the dead.<sup>102</sup>

However, this hypothesis has been refuted by Walter Burkert. Starting from the argument that it is impossible to trace a continuous cult from the dark age or the Mycenaean cult of the dead on the grounds of archaeological findings, Burkert develops the idea that the worship of heroes is directly derived from the influence of the epic poetry that flourished at a time.<sup>103</sup>

However, his argumentation is questionable if we take into consideration the following facts: already in the *Iliad* we come across the term demigod – *hēmigeon geno- andrwn*. An idea about heroes as semi gods was developed by Hesiod in the frame of the myth about four generations that lived on Earth from its creation.<sup>104</sup> The paradox of the hero cult is that it is grounded in the mortality and was related to the graves – the one who is dead is mortal not immortal. Or it is not so? At this point, I would like to turn again to the theory of Olga Freidenberg. Her argumentation on this issue is that the divinisation of the dead should be understood through the concept of the divine that existed in the pre-religious period. Freidenberg, namely, argues that it was the period when the idea of god existed, but before the notion of the divine. “It is wrong to think that people used to believe in totems and that afterwards, they exchanged totems with the gods. The same as the image of a tsar

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<sup>101</sup> Nilsson 1952, 104.

<sup>102</sup> Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 1321-2. Greek text ed. Gilbert Murray, English translation E. P. Coleridge, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>103</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, V, 304; XII, 383; 449; XX, 287;

<sup>104</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XII, 23; Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 160.

existed before the social institution of power of the tsar, the idea of god existed before religion... and the dead were considered to be deities."<sup>105</sup> So Freidenberg's position about the hero cult is related to her idea of the early concept of the grave (the house and the shrine of the dead and the heroes) as a womb that brings rebirth. The aspect of heroes as brave warriors is, according to Freidenberg, directly related to the concept of *agôn* as a confrontation with death that brings rebirth and renewal. The main motive in the life of the hero is a fight (as well as eating) that, as I have already claimed in the introduction, represents a metaphor of death that brings rebirth.<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the rise of the hero cult under the influence of epic poetry functionally stands in close relation to the development of the polis. The introduction of this cult was a result of political change and an effort to justify political associating on the account of family nucleus and tribes. However, the honours that heroes and ancestors received stayed quite the same.<sup>107</sup> The rise in the importance of certain individual graves from hero cults occurred parallel to the decline in importance of the cult of the dead.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, the development of the hero cult did not mean the disappearance of the dead cult, since both family and political cults of the dead functioned as a kind of basis for society. But, in Athens of the fifth century, even the number of individual funeral monuments was in decline. The reason for this should be sought in the democratic ideology and the attempts of polis to control family funerary practice by overtaking the funeral of the fallen soldiers and performing it publicly.<sup>109</sup> The role of the funeral monument was no longer to glorify an individual, but the state collectively; the same as with the hero cult, public funerals became

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<sup>105</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 44.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>107</sup> Agones as funeral contests for noble men afterwards disappear from the funerary ritual and appear in the hero cult.

<sup>108</sup> Burkert 1985, 204.

<sup>109</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 34.

the means for manipulation and creation of the common political ideals.<sup>110</sup>

The importance of heroes and their credibility was achieved through their closeness to the chthonic gods and belonging to the chthonic cult. Apart from the mortality, the difference between heroes and gods was, as Greeks believed, in the fact that gods lived far from people, unlike heroes who were always close and therefore able to give support whenever it was necessary. They help in healing or support the soldiers and cities in critical moments during the battles; they are also famous as founders of city-states, they give prophecies (the same as the souls of the dead) and they are responsible for the fertility of the soil.<sup>111</sup> As it is argued in this chapter, the cult of the heroes is to a large extent a political invention that facilitated social transformation through the change and by the support of the religious cults. The next issue that interests me is the Greek conceptualization of death and the attitude towards it. Was there only one view of death, or were there many views, and to which extent the discourse about this existential and metaphysical question was created by the state?

### **3) Death as a horror and beautiful death**

Together with birth, death represents a turning point in every life. The cultural model of a proper time for death varies and does not necessarily coincide with what is statistically most frequent. As I am going to represent, in Greek public discourse, a good death

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<sup>110</sup> Morris 1992, 131.

<sup>111</sup> Very often the cult of Christian saints is, due to continuity and many structural parallels, related to the cult of heroes. The same as heroes, saints are mortals who gained their honour after their death due to some merits. Although neither heroes, nor saints are gods, they have some kind of divine power and may influence lives of people. However, in the Christian saint cult is possible to recognize not only heroes, but also old pagan divinities and cults they had in pre-Christian time.

is the death of a young warrior. But, before focusing on the ideal of beautiful death, let me first concentrate on the concept of death as it has been problematised by Jean-Pierre Vernant.

Namely, Vernant approaches death through the concept of otherness, not the one that refers to representations that the Greeks invented constructing themselves in relation to the others (barbarians, slaves, women, youth), but through the concept of “the other of the person”. Recognizing the absolute otherness in the mask of Gorgo, Vernant interprets this mask as a non-mask – the face of the Other, which translates the killing gaze.<sup>112</sup> In this way, the face of Gorgo becomes one’s double, the double in the world Beyond, the Other. “It is a strange response to your own face, like an image in the mirror (in which the Greeks could only see themselves frontally and in the form of a disembodied head), but at the same time, it is an image that is both less and more than yourself... A radical otherness with which you yourself will be identified as you are turned to stone.”<sup>113</sup> However, Vernant states that there is another, completely different concept of death, the one glorified in Greek epic poetry. Contrary to the perception of death that embodies horror and darkness, the unsaid, unbearable dreadfulness in the land of Oblivion, the other face of death is a glorious and magnificent ideal to which a true hero is committed. Although the concept of the beautiful death (*kalos thanatos*) was constructed in epic poetry, the continuation of it is possible to recognise through history. The motif of such heroic commitment lies in regaining permanent life through the name and fame reached by heroic and brave death. So, the reason

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<sup>112</sup> The mask is reduced individuality, it is like a shadow or reflection in the mirror and it is not alive. Thus, one who wears a mask during masquerade embodies the powers of beyond and these powers control and influence its mimic, gestures and voice.

<sup>113</sup> Vernant 1992, 138. This refutes the idea of Philippe Ariès that pagan antiquity used to perceive death as benign. Ariès 1989, 29. The truth is that people lived much more accommodated to the idea of death and that their existence was related to their dead ancestors, but this did not exclude the idea that death was terrifying and horrible.

for, and the nature of heroic death, entails ambiguous motivation: to die in order to live, and to live in order to die. Actually, heroes who choose to die young, in the prime of their beauty, youth and strength, avoid growing old. Instead of going down slowly and dying gradually, they give their life in some heroic exploit, while still young. In a sense, they exchange their life for staying young. In this way, life in its climax turns into death to be saved that way. Of course, their life imperishably continues in the social sphere, in collective memory. Obviously, the beautiful death and the glory that it brings refer only to the death of men on the battlefield.<sup>114</sup> Two concepts of death – the dreadful and the heroic – are not as contradictory as it might seem at first sight. Namely, the heroic ideal is created on the grounds of the belief that death is monstrous and unbearable. “There would be no merit in the hero confronting death, choosing it and making it his own. There can be no heroes if there are no monsters to fight and overcome.”<sup>115</sup>

#### **4) Narrative about heroic death in the epic poetry**

Let me, for a moment, discuss the ideal of heroic death famously sung by Homer, in the context of the fifth century Athens. Although Homer, without any doubt, refers to the heroism of mythical beings, since Achilles is half human, half divine, who does have the opportunity to choose – either a short and glorious life, or long and infamous one, the concept of heroic death survived the mythology and epic, becoming a narrative many times exploited by

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<sup>114</sup> In her study on the issue of women’s death in Greek tragedy, Nicole Loraux researched women’s heroic death. She concludes that the fact that heroines in tragedies face often violent death, make these deaths similar to heroic deaths of men. The women’s battlefield is, according to Loraux, their nuptial bed. However, the concept of women’s heroic death (though not applicable in all cases) is that women in tragedies die usually from suicide, while men are murdered. More on the topic see Loraux 1987.

<sup>115</sup> Vernant 1981, 288.

patriarchal societies, especially in periods of crises and wars when it was necessary to mobilize people and make them eager both to die and to kill. The beautiful and heroic death promises eternal glory.

In the funeral oration held for the Athenian soldiers during the Sicilian expedition in the Peloponnesian war, Perikles promises eternal glory to everyone who bravely died in the war exploit.<sup>116</sup> Although Perikles states that each of the fallen soldiers receives individually the “renown which never grows old”, in the same sentence he claims that they gave their life collectively (“this offering of their lives made in common”). Thus, individual in the war-time disappears drowning into the collectivity, being thus, as Morin observes, identified with the homeland. Confirmation of society goes before the confirmation of the individual and in the view of Morin, the war atmosphere changes the concept and the idea of death that otherwise exists.<sup>117</sup>

This leads to the position of Baudrillard that death becomes the principal of rationality that rules human lives. Baudrillard states that everything around us always has a certain functional purpose not only in the material world, but also in the sphere of fulfillments of our dreams and wishes. “Contrary to our dream to lose everything, to forget everything, we build the wall of the contrary relations, connections, information, condense in insolvable artificial memory where we bury ourselves alive, with the hope of a fossil by which we will one day be discovered.”<sup>118</sup> And this idea developed to its ultimate instance, may be recognised in any war propaganda that revives and promotes the heroic ideal. It is based exactly on human weakness and wish to “cheat” and “overcome” death. It is the emptiness of life and dreadful fear of death that make the heroic ideal so attractive. Looking as some active and energetic attitude

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<sup>116</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 43, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Morin 1981, 45.

<sup>118</sup> Baudrillard 1976, 210.

towards death, it is the worst and the most horrible destroyer of life. This is just a phantom of beauty.

As I have already stated, the ideal of heroic death was created in the epic poetry. After all, the purpose of epic poetry was to recall the great deeds. That is why poetry had an exceptional role in education of classical Greece, in transmitting, producing and influencing not only knowledge, but also believes and values that create culture.<sup>119</sup> However, we should not forget that epic poetry in Greek culture was always a performance, not only due to the fact that epics were transmitted as an oral poetry from generation to generation, but also (and this is quite important for later periods) because of the nature of the Greek books and reading, which was exclusively aloud.<sup>120</sup> Another ancient Greek “medium” through which the heroic ideal was “propagated” was pottery, the objects for everyday use, with their various purposes – keeping or drinking wine, oil recipients, keeping corps etc. All these vases were necessarily decorated with different images – either with scenes from everyday life, or with different mythological scenes (often with the heroic thematic) that always formed a kind of story – one could keep a vase in hands and look at the story in a circle – from left to right, from bottom to up, from inside to outside. It functioned as some kind of Greek television.<sup>121</sup>

There is no doubt that the heroic ideal was created through propaganda, which, through its mechanism, creates “truth” that is not necessarily true, being usually its radical opposite. In the light of that, it is not surprising that under the surface of the heroic ideal there is actually a hidden fear. This fear of death stays concealed, and the main idea on which propaganda of Greek heroic concept is based is the male characteristic of courage – *andreia*. So, the heroic

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>120</sup> If we try to transpose this mechanism of propaganda of the immortal spirit to some other, recent, period, we should search its models not only in literature, but in all other mass media production.

<sup>121</sup> Slapšak 2006, 12-13.

death of a true hero is a death that he courageously faces, and certainly not as one who longs for some kind of liberation:

kaitoi genomenh- lesch- o- genoito auitwn  
aristo-, egnwsan oil paragenomenoi Spartihtewn  
Aristodhmon men boulomenon fanerw- apotanein  
ek th- pareoush- oil aijtih-, lusswntav te kai;  
ekleiptwn thn taxin efga apodexasqai megalai,  
Poseidwnion de; ou boulomenon apoqnhskein  
ahdra genesqai agaqon: tosoutw/ touton eihai  
ajneinw

Nevertheless, when there was a general discussion about who had borne himself most bravely, those Spartans who were there judged that Aristodamus, who plainly wished to die because of the reproach hanging over him and so rushed out and left the battle column behind, had achieved great deeds, but that Posidonius, who had no wish to die, proved himself a courageous fighter, and so in this way he was the better man.<sup>122</sup>

In this fragment Herodotus informs us that after the battle of Plataea, the Spartans deprived Aristodamus of his posthumous glory and proclaimed that their bravest soldier was Posidonius, because his wish to die was related to his courage, and not, as in the case of Aristodamus, with the idea that death would save him from hardships of his life. Nuance is actually embodied in the difference between the verbs that mean “to wish” – *boulomai* that stands for personal inclination, and word *ethelô* that is the wish of reason.<sup>123</sup>

But this concept, so often used for manipulation by the state and army commanders, is probably related to the earlier and forgotten beliefs that the death of a young person was considered to be happiness and a blessing. I will return to this idea a little bit later,

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<sup>122</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, IX, 71, 3. English and Greek texts ed. by A. D. Godley, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>123</sup> Loraux 1993, 102-104.

after making a short parallel with a contemporary example of promoting death in war propaganda.

Similar, but not completely the same concept of a “beautiful death” might be recognised in the context of wars in ex-Yugoslavia and spreading of war propaganda. As Ivan Čolović points, the powerful mechanism of this national ideology was that all political leaders, political programs and conflicts were presented through the fixed traditional clichés and formulas in the same way in which values, persons and antagonisms were presented in the folklore and mythical tale. Exactly this is the force from which political formulas obtain enormous power. Exceeding the political domain and entering the mythical, they evoke antagonism between absolute values, such as good/evil, life/death, human/inhuman.<sup>124</sup> According to Čolović, the power of folklore and folk culture as means of manipulation is grounded in presentation and perception of it as something natural that is related to the native soil, as something original that precedes arrogance and decline of civilization. Of course, the folkloristic material for political purpose had to be reshaped and rearranged. Čolović also emphasizes that people are often ignorant of their folk tradition, which actually makes them more inclined to adopt such a pattern.<sup>125</sup> Concerning the construction of the Serbian ideal, important in this political/mythical machinery, a paradigm was made around the construct of the “nation elected by God” and particularly on the grounds of the Kosovo myth.<sup>126</sup> Ideal Serbs became imagined

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<sup>124</sup> Čolović 2000, 38.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-89.

<sup>126</sup> An important aspect of symbolic and metaphoric layers of Serbian religious and traditional beliefs related to death and regaining of eternal life in the kingdom of Heaven is brilliantly analyzed on the example of traditional poem “Propast carstva srpskoga” (“The fall of the Serbian Kingdom”) by Dušan Bandić in his book *Carstvo zemljsko i carstvo nebesko 1990 (Kingdom of Earth and Kingdom of Heaven)*. This study was published in 1990, a year before the war in ex-Yugoslavia started, but in the time when *Kosovo myth* was already exploited by the machinery of national propaganda. The author was very

as warriors, brave and courageous, but at the same time innocent and pure like virgins. This purity defines the position of the victim, while innocence leads directly to death. Thus the “beauty” of these heroic deaths lies, not in the youngness, and the attempt to gain immortality through heroic deeds as in ancient Greece, but in innocence. Innocence with weapons and death decorum invokes a special type of death and violence erotic, which adds attraction to the nationalist narrative. Death becomes ideal itself, being equated with all forces of good confronted to the powers of evil, according to the pattern of mythical binaries.

## 5) Kleos

Let me return to Greek heroic death and focus for a while on the concept of glory. Dying started long before physical death and it ended only after all phases of ritual were properly done, so the dead

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extinguished ethnographer and anthropologist who gave significant contribution to the research of Serbian traditional religion and especially death.

According to the poem, in the eve, just before the Kosovo battle, the czar Lazar receives the message from the mother of God, either to go the battlefield, fight with Turks, survive and fulfill earthly destiny, or to build a church, go there with his army and afterwards to die, in order to live ever after in the kingdom of Heaven. Bandić emphasizes that in spite of the mentioning of Church and Christian tone in this poem, the traditional religion and worldview of the poem was much stronger than the subsequent Christian layers (the poem was written down in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by Vuk Karadžić). Czar Lazar decided to die for his faith, and to live eternally (since earthly living is limited). The question that Bandić further imposes is why the natural death was not good enough for regaining immortality, answering that in Serbian traditional worldview all people continued their existence in the world Beyond, but it lasted as long as the memory could keep them. Only distinguished ones could provide eternal glory. And exactly that happened with czar Lazar. One of the biggest defeats in Serbian history (Kosovo battle) is nowadays celebrated as a victory, so as the ideal of sacrificing life for the “faith”. “The faith of czar Lazar is not anything else, but the kind of metaphor used for representation of historical destiny of Serbs.” See more in Bandić, 1990.

could enter the Underworld. Nothing was more shameful for Greeks than to die without a grave, without grief and lament. If a dying person was prevented to die completely and to enter the other world without proper burial, it was a sign of great hostility. Thus, a person who is not properly mourned, belongs neither to the living nor to the dead, but exists on the horrible edge, neither dead, nor alive. The abandoned corpse is left to birds and dogs to be devoured and could never enter the world of shades. Relating and contrasting the lack of burial and mistreatment of the enemy's corpse and its ugliness, with the youth and the beauty of the body of the fallen hero to whom it is more important to die beautifully than to continue living, the importance of a beautiful death becomes obvious. In the same context, to deprive someone of a beautiful death appears to be a great humiliation and a sign of defeat.<sup>127</sup>

However, the question that is posed is why is it so important to keep beauty in death as well, if the soul abandons the body. The reason is related to the concept of *aphithon kleos* (imperishable glory) and the necessity that glory, name and exploits of the hero become famous to the generations to come.<sup>128</sup> But to attain such a glory, it is essential to retain *timê* (honour) not only in the moment of death, but also in the adequate funeral rite. Only if these conditions are fulfilled, it is possible to gain everlasting fame – either through song, or through a monument. Those two forms make possible for the deceased to continue to exist in the social sphere, of course, bearing the values that the body incarnated in the moment of death. Now, the everlasting existence of the creature continues on another plane, without any attrition of time and destruction. Her/his fame becomes immortal and celebrated in songs through the spoken, recited words, or by monument as the memorial (*mnêma*), which through the fixity and stability of the *sêma* – stone grave marker,

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<sup>127</sup> Vernant 1987, 67.

<sup>128</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, IX, 413.

emphasizes imperishable existence in which the deceased has moved.<sup>129</sup>

However, apart from this interpretation of *kleos* by Jean-Pierre Vernant, there is another perspective of approaching the issue of glory. Jasper Svenbro developed a semantic analysis of grave monuments discussing the phenomenon of *kleos* on the example of the first excavated tombstone with both statue of the deceased and the inscription on it preserved. It is the tombstone of *Phrasikleia*, the maiden whose name Svenbro translates as “she-who-draws-attention-to-*kleos*” or “she-who-pays-attention-to-*kleos*”, depending on whether the first element is derived from *phrasai* – “to show”, or from *phrasasthai* – “to pay attention to”.<sup>130</sup> Through the analysis of her name, the inscription and symbols on the statue, Svenbro argues that the tombstone of *Phrasikleia* “emanates” *kleos*, the ideal that mortals are able to reach either by famous and heroic deeds, or by descendants. *Phrasikleia* is the daughter who keeps the fame of her ancestors. Her *kleos* is renewed every time when a passer-by reads the epigram on the tombstone, since reading in ancient Greece always requires pronunciation aloud.<sup>131</sup> It is obvious that this action, reading words carved into the stone aloud, is the technique of communication with the Underworld, being at the same time breakthrough of the one world into another (in both directions) – *kleos* makes possible to evade forgetfulness, the same *Lêthê*, which appears as the Underworld river, from which the dead had to drink.

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<sup>129</sup> Vernant 1981, 67-69.

<sup>130</sup> This interpretation does not coincide with the one that offers Pierre Chantraine in his *Dictionnaire étymologique* in which *Frasikleia* is taken to mean “famous for her thoughts”. However, offering his interpretation, Svenbro takes into consideration definition that stands for *Frasidhmo-* defined by Chantraine as “he-who-pays-attention-to-people”. Svenbro 1993, 13 cf. Chantraine 1968-1980, 1125, 1128.

<sup>131</sup> “In truth, letters were meaningless for the average Greek reader until they were spoken. Letters had to be pronounced aloud if the text was to become intelligible.” Svenbro 1993, 4. More on ancient Greek reading see Havelock 1991 and Thomas 1992.

*Kleos* is thus a concept that incapacitates forgetfulness and, in regards to funeral inscriptions and ritual praxis, it did not belong only to the men, brave and famous soldiers, but to anyone who was not forgotten in death.

## **6) Beautiful life - beautiful death: alternative worldview**

However, there is another myth that reveals another aspect of beautiful death. Namely, it is the story of Kleobis and Biton retold by Herodotus. When Solon visited Croesus in Sardis and after seeing all of Croesus' treasure, he was asked to answer who was the happiest man in the world. He put some Tellos of Athens in first place because he had a nice family, sons and grandsons and finally died in the battle and received public burial on the battlefield. As the second blessed Solon named Kleobis and Biton, two young Argives who died at the peak of their youth and strength. Namely, their mother wanted to go to the festivity of Hera of Argos, but her oxen disappeared and instead of oxen, her strong sons were the ones who brought her on their arms to the temple of Hera. First, they all enjoyed in great celebration and feast. After that, their mother prayed to Hera to give her children what was the best the goddess could give. After that pray, Kleobis and Biton happily fell asleep in a temple and died in a dream.<sup>132</sup> Although the myth is not about a real sacrificial ritual, it approaches it: in the exploit in which two young men demonstrated enormous strength in order to show respect to their mother and to the goddess, Hera honoured them the best she could – she donated them death in the peak of their youth and strength.

This myth is not about heroism, not about great deeds and not about the concept of heroic death. But what does this myth and the context in which it was retold, reveal? Precisely the opposite.

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<sup>132</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, I, 31, 1.

Namely, the wise man was forced to answer the question about the life happiness to the greedy, vain, rich and powerful Croesus. Of course, Croesus expected Solon to yield in to him. But, in vain. Solon did not mention anything that would approve any value of power, glory or any kind of heroism. Solon praised a simple life, without great ambitions, without honest devotion to anything except the closest kin (mother) and frank faith to gods. Namely, according to Solon, the happiest was Tellos of Athens, modest and devoted both to his family and to his patriotic duties. The praising of heroic life, as we have seen, does correspond to the prevailing values of the fifth century B. C. when Herodotus lived. But what about the second answer? The myth about Kleobis and Biton reveals another value of death and life. They lived a simple life, with no ambitions, and no public achievements. The brothers lived in harmony, loving their mother and being ready to do for her anything that she wished. The award for this was death. Unlike the first rated Tellos who belongs and fits into the context and promoted values of the fifth century Athens, the second rated Kleobis and Biton point to the myth of some older period, which directly relates to the mother, Hera – the goddess of life (and death), and the death of youth, revealing the perception of inseparable relation between life, death, and its celebration. This might lead to the conclusion that the exact period of this part of myth i.e. its origin is related to the time when death was perceived as a precondition of life. The idea that relates to the heroic concept of beautiful death and the one of Kleobis and Biton is the belief that it is a blessing to die at the peak of strength and youth. If we adopt the mentioned idea about “fixed traditional clichés” from Ivan Čolović, according to whom war propaganda uses matrixes that already exist in folklore, then we inevitably return to the interpretation of Olga Freidenberg and the stage of human cognition preserved in folkloristic material, according to which death appears to be a condition for rebirth, i.e. new life. Even the chronology confirms this interpretation – the first rated are the “current” civic values of Tellos, understandable for each Athenian. The myth that follows reveals only a “pattern”, a “traditional cliché” that made fixing the idea through the mechanisms of propaganda possible.

What is interesting in the use of heroic ideal in the context of public discourse of the Greek city-states, is that it covers rather ambiguous ideas. On one hand, the epic heroic ideal focuses on individual exploits and the estimation of virtue that distinguishes one person among the others. After all, Achilles was “the best of the Achaeans” (*aristos Achaiôn*).<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, new principles of civic ideology and participation in the political life of all citizens equally, slightly changes the heroic ideal based on human excellence (*aretê*) that started to require the feeling of belonging to the group, and contributing to the common victory.<sup>134</sup> The required heroic virtues are possible to read from the Pericles’ speech on the public funeral of the Athenian soldiers, after the failure of the Sicilian expedition during the Peloponnesian war:

kai; oil j de mey proshkontw- th/ polei toioide  
 egenonto: tou- de; loipu- crh; ajsfalesteran men  
 eufesqai, ajtolmoteran de; mhden ajxioun thn ej-  
 tou- polemion- dianoiou ekein, skopounta- mh;  
 logw/ monw/ thn wjfelian, hh aj ti- pro- oujden  
 ceiron aujtou- uma- polew- dunamin kaq j hmeran  
 efgw/ qew,enou- kai; ejrasta- gignomenou- aujth-  
 kai oktan umin megalen dokh/ eihai, ejqumenou-  
 oti tolmwntes kai gignwskonte- ta; deonta kai;  
 ejh toi- efgoi- ajsxunomenoi ahdre- aujta;  
 ekthsanto, thn polin ge th- setera- ajreth-  
 ajxiounte- steriskein, kalliston de; efanon aujth/  
 proiemenoi.

So died these men as became Athenians. You, their survivors, must determine to have as unaltering a resolution in the field, though you may pray that it may have a happier issue. And not contented with ideas derived only from words of the advantages which are

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<sup>133</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I, 242.

<sup>134</sup> Vernant 1992, 220.

bound up with the defense of your country, though these would furnish a valuable text to a speaker even before an audience so alive to them as the present, you must yourselves realize the power of Athens, and feed your eyes upon her from day to day, till love of her fills your hearts; and then when all her greatness shall break upon you, you must reflect that it was by courage, sense of duty, and a keen feeling of honor in action that men were enabled to win all this, and that no personal failure in an enterprise could make them consent to deprive their country of their valor, but they laid it at her feet as the most glorious contribution that they could offer.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, individualism that was the main heroic virtue in epic poetry was not desirable in democracy and was actually contradictory to its main concept – isonomy (the equal distribution of political rights and duties). No matter how illogical this might seem, all heroic virtues (“courage”, “sense of duty”, “keen feeling of honor”) became incorporated in the norms of civic morality and collectivistic feeling of equality, while heroism and virtue were subjugated to the “power of Athens”, not of the individual.

Let me, for a moment turn further to Pericles’ speech in order to discuss the “promise” of heroic ideal of death, and the way in which it appears in the context of the fifth century Athens. The main prize of the heroic death is promise of the eternal glory:

koinh, gar ta; swmata didontes iplw/ ton aghrwn  
epainon ej ambanon kai; ton tafon epishemotaton.  
ouk ej w/ keintai mallon. ajl j ej w/ h/ dokh  
aujtw n para; tw/ ejtucontio aiji; kai; logou kai;  
ejrgou kairw/ aipimnhesto- kataleipetai. ajdrwn

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<sup>135</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, I, 43, 1. Greek text based on Thucydides, *Historiae* in two volumes. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 1942, English translation by J. M. Dent [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu)

gar epifanwn pasa gh garfo~, kai ouj sthlwn monon ej th/ mh; proshkoush/ agrafo~ mnhmh par j ekastw/ th~ gnwmh~ mallon hj tou efgou ejdiaitatai. ou~ nun uinei~ zhwsante~ kai; to; eulycon krinante~ mh; periorasqe tou~ polemikou~ kindunou~.

For this offering of their lives made in common by them all, that each of them individually received that renown which never grows old, and for a sepulcher, not so much that in which their bones have been deposited, but that noblest of shrines wherein their glory is laid up to be eternally remembered upon every occasion on which deed or story shall fall for its commemoration. For heroes have the whole earth for their tomb; and in lands far from their own, where the column with its epitaph declares it, there is enshrined in every breast a record unwritten with no tablet to preserve it, except that of the heart. These take as your model, and judging happiness to be the fruit of freedom and freedom of valor, never decline the dangers of war.<sup>136</sup>

According to this speech, the fallen soldiers are heroes, who achieve immortality through the fame that “never grows old” and glory that is going to be “eternally remembered”; the tombs where they lie are the “noblest shrines”, actually “the whole earth is their tomb”. Even the monument is not necessary to built because the dead will be remembered in the hearts of their descendants. It is obvious that Pericles addresses not the dead, as it is usual in the traditional lament, but the audience (as it is appropriate for a rhetorical genre such is funeral oration), in particular those men, citizens, who are advised to bravely approach death whenever the country needs this. It is the happiness to fight and die for freedom, claims Pericles.

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<sup>136</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 43, 2.

Quoting Pericles' speech written down by historian Thucydides, inserts another "puzzle" into the picture of ancient Greek civic ideology based on the control over death and the dead. Namely, Athenians invented a new rhetorical genre – with a literary origin (not oral, as lamentation) in which they praised and commemorated those who died for the glory of their homeland. Thucydides mentions that Athenians were the only ones who give such funeral orations.<sup>137</sup> These orations were held usually in the time of crisis or wartime, when the polis decided to take care of the funeral of its soldiers, and deprive families from their exclusive right to take care of their dead and to accompany them to the underworld. According to the so-called ancestral law (*patrios nomos*), introduced by the city-state, the corpses of the fallen soldiers were returned to Athens and buried together.<sup>138</sup> This title of "ancestral law" points to the conclusion that the law has been existing from time immemorial, although it was introduced by Athenian city-state in the 5<sup>th</sup> ct. Exactly this title alluding that it was something even "our ancestors" used to do, was meant to persuade people in its credibility, and discredit funeral lamentation. Same as today, the propaganda of classical Athens was creating its own "truths".

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<sup>137</sup> Dhemostenes, *Against Leptines*, 141. I will devote the whole chapter to the issue of power of speech over the grave – restrictive laws against women's lamentation and introduction of new rhetorical genre.

<sup>138</sup> The corpses, or all bones dead that were found, used to be grouped by tribe in common coffins and interred together. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 34.

### III

## Time, Subsequence and Structure in Death Rituals

### 1) Time and/for death

Death and dying are long and complex processes, which begin with the first signs and preparations for death. Greeks believed that the deceased could achieve a happy existence in the Underworld only if all rituals were properly done. In that sense, the process of dying was regarded as complete and successful only after the performance of the appropriate ritual practice within the defined period of time. If this were not the case, the soul of the dead person was destined to a hard afterlife in the world beyond. When Odysseus visited the underworld, the first soul he met was that of Elpenor, who died in Circe's house after falling from the roof in a drunken stupor. Elpenor asked Odysseus to perform for him funeral rituals that he had been deprived from:

**mhv m j aklouton aqapton ijwn opiqen  
katal eipein,  
nosfisqeiv, mhv ti qewn mhnima genwma.**

Do not go thence leaving me unwaked and unburied  
behind you,  
or I may bring the gods' anger upon you.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from this fragment that the most important ritual acts that follow someone's death are mourning and burial. The importance of fulfilling these ritual tasks is also obvious in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, in which Electra cries and curses her mother because she did not bury and mourn Agamemnon

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<sup>1</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 72-3. English trans. by Samuel Butler.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

appropriately.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, the ritual duties around the dead belonged within the competence of women. The strict job distribution between men and women on the occasion of death, but also in everyday life (e.g. the ban on men having access to women's parts of the house, or on women having access to the public space, or the early custom of separate meals for men and for women) is intrinsically related to the early religious concept that such intrusions represent a religious offence.<sup>3</sup>

In contemporary societies death often begins in the hospital. Decision on the "proper" time for death is usually affected by the age, but also by the social status of the patient (agreement upon the beginning of death is made earlier for the poor, the old, addicts or alcoholics than for the young and well-off patients). In Greek antiquity death began with foretokens recognized in dreams or by some other omens, which were believed to announce death. What this means is that the dying process started before the physical death. One of the most common foretellers of death, not only in Greece, but throughout the Balkan area, were birds.<sup>4</sup> Pre-announcement of death might have involved hearing or seeing such a bird.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it was believed that dreams could announce someone's end, as in the episode of Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, where Clytemnestra dreams that she would die by the hand of her son.<sup>6</sup> That kind of dream symbols which were omens and foretokens of death, together with other dream symbols, are gathered in a famous collection

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<sup>2</sup> Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, 429-433. Sophocles, *Antigo*, 26-29, 203, 876.

<sup>3</sup> In such a way Olga Freidenerg also interprets the praxis of covering the face with a veil in the Muslim world. Freidenerg 1987, 176.

<sup>4</sup> Birds are still believed to be foretellers of death in the rural areas through the Balkan region. In the west Peloponnesus (Inner Mani), *nekropouli* (the birds of death) are related to different kind of vultures. Cf. Čajkanović 1994, 5, 56; Seremetakis 1991, 50.

<sup>5</sup> A crow as an inauspicious bird appears in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1473.

<sup>6</sup> Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, 524-550.

*Oneirôkritika* (*Dream interpretation book*) by Artemidor Daldianus, a Hellenistic author born in Asia Minor.<sup>7</sup>

The long tradition of dream omens related to death in Greek folklore often reveals the continuity from Greek antiquity to Modern times of the characteristic of death that I have already mentioned – death does not begin with the physical end, but even before, when physical life has not reached its very end. An explanation of such an understanding of death should be sought in the far past and time of early human cognition, when clear boundaries between life and death were not yet established. It should not be forgotten that such a conceptualization of the world and life is also affected by conceiving of time-spatial categories.<sup>8</sup> In the period of the early human cognition, time could have been understood only visually – as spatial category and only as the present moment. There was only “here and now”, without the awareness of the future or the past. Therefore, everything used to be actual and alive; death was the same as life, affected by the constant transformation and dynamics. No perception of the end followed it. And no clear boundaries could possibly be set in place.

Obligations for performing funerary rites for kin are closely associated with religious beliefs and traditional praxis, but, as is pointed by Humphreys, from the classical period it stands also in relation to issues of inheritance. Of course, this relationship between funerary obligations and inheritance could also provoke undignified quarrels over the corpse, but this was usually prevented by the timely written, or orally expressed, testament before death.<sup>9</sup> At the moment,

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<sup>7</sup> Born in Asia Minor in the second ct. BC, Artemidor Daldianus travelled a lot through Greece, its islands, and Italy. His *Oneirôkritika* is based, apart from his own experience, on all the books that he read on this (he claims that he read them all). Artemidor Daldianus informs us that if someone dreams that an eagle is sitting on his head, it means death, because everything that eagle catches has to die.

<sup>8</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 56. 1997, 66.

<sup>9</sup> Humphreys 1996, 83-84.

however, I want to focus on traditional techniques around the dead, leaving the themes of legislation and funerals for later. I will start with the first stage of the funeral ritual, introducing it with fragment from Euripides *The Phoenician women*:

εἰ γὰρ δὴ ἤκω μετὰ  
γεῖρην ἀπέλ' φηὶ γράϊαν Ἰοκάστην, ὄψω-  
λοῦσθ' / ποχῆται τ' οὐκέτ' ὄψα παῖδ' ἐμῶν.  
τοῖ- γὰρ ἄνουςι χρῆ; τὸν οὐχ τεγνεῖ κότε  
τίμα;· δίδοντα σπονδῶν εὐσεβῶν γεῶν.

But now I have come for my sister Jocasta, age seeking  
age,  
that she may bathe my child's corpse and lay it out.  
For those who are not dead must reverence  
the god below by paying honor to the dead.<sup>10</sup>

## 2) Prothêsis – disposition of the corpse, wake

Creon, king of Thebes, is carrying in his arms his dead son Menoeceus. He is looking for his sister (female, closest kin) to take care of the deceased. As soon as Menoeceus exhaled his last breath, the first stage of the ritual was about to start – preparing and laying out the body.<sup>11</sup> The formal lying-in-state of the dead is called *prothêsis* and represents one of the main phases of the funeral rite; it includes bathing, beautifying the body, guarding it, and mourning. *Prothêsis* lasts until the moment when the dead body is being carried to the grave (during the night, before the third morning).

Regarding the corpse and its disposition, the necessary procedure is as follows: washing it with warm water, cleansing any soiling or stains, effacing its wounds with an unguent, anointing it

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<sup>10</sup> Euripides *Phoenissae*, 1318-1321. English translation by E. P. Coleridge; Greek ed. Gilbert Murray. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>11</sup> Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 1318-1321.

with oils and adorning it with flowers, wreaths, ribbons and jewellery. But, how to explain the paradox of the treatment of the dead, and making it beautiful, before its complete disappearance from the world of living? The beauty of the body displayed during *prothêsis* just before its ultimate disappearance, may, according to Vernant, have only one function – its disappearance from the world of living in such beautiful shape is a means by which the dead could keep the same shape in the underworld.<sup>12</sup>

This entire work concerning the corpse was the duty of women. According to Demosthenes, only women who were over the age of sixty were allowed to take part in this ritual phase.<sup>13</sup> When properly prepared, the dead body was laid out to be viewed, guarded and mourned by the closest kin.<sup>14</sup> The corpse, wrapped in a shroud, *enduma*, covered with *epiblêmata* and laid on a thick carpet-like *strôma* was displayed on a plank-like structure with long legs, a so-called *klinê* (a dining couch or bed). The legs of the corpse were pointed towards the door.<sup>15</sup> The head was elevated by pillows – *proskephalaia*. Kurtz and Boardman note that representations of the *prothêsis* on painted plaques and vases show remarkable uniformity.<sup>16</sup> Vase paintings from the geometric periods, as well as later representational and literary evidence, depict women as having the major role in the performance of lament, preparation of the corpse for burial, and also in attendance at the *prothêsis*.<sup>17</sup> Up until the late archaic period, this stage of the ritual used to be a grand, public occasion.<sup>18</sup> However, restrictive laws of the sixth and fifth

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<sup>12</sup> Vernant 1992, 70.

<sup>13</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 633.

<sup>15</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XIX, 212. Hesych. s. v. *diekquriwn*.

<sup>16</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 144.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>18</sup> The wake as a public funeral was analyzed by Reiner on the example of the Dipylon vase from the 8<sup>th</sup> century. See Reiner 1938.

centuries moved it from out of doors to inside the household, which turned this public ceremony into a private one:

**ton apoqanonta protiqesqai eñdon.**

To lay-down the deceased within the household.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, this comment of Demosthenes does not give us precise information about removing the wake from public space. Namely, the word *endon* may be understood ambiguously, as referring either to the inner space of house itself, or to the whole household, including its courtyard. Whichever is the case, the wake was no longer a public event, as it used to be.

One of the important measures taken at the ritual stage of preparing the body for the wake is the closing of the corpse's mouth, eyes and other orifices. This was because, it was believed that those orifices were roads to the Underworld, and that if they stayed open, there was the danger that someone else could have been dragged down and died. The gaping of jaws was in antiquity controlled by *othonaia* – straps that were fitted around the head in order to hold the jaw closed.<sup>20</sup> Once in the underworld, Agamemnon could not forgive Clytemnestra for not closing his eyes and his mouth:

**oujlev moi eñth ipnti per eij- jAidao  
cersi; kat j oñfqaImou; eleein sun te stom j  
eñreisai.**

And even though I was going to the house of Hades

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<sup>19</sup> Demosthenes, 43.62.

<sup>20</sup> A golden version of the device that fixes the jaws shut was also found in Athens, but the date is uncertain. However, this kind of device is widespread all across the Greek world from the late bronze Age Cyprus, seventh century Rhodes and Athens (Kerameikos) and Cyprus of the fourth century. Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 212-213. The custom is traceable all up to rural Greece of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Seremetakis 1991, 64-68.

deigned neither to draw down my eyelids with her fingers nor to close my mouth.<sup>21</sup>

Interesting literary evidence about *prothêsis* and the guarding of the corpse is given by Apuleius of Madaura (2<sup>nd</sup> ct AD). He writes in particular about Thessaly, revealing one more aspect of this ritual stage. In a fragment of his *Metamorphoses* there is a scene at the market in Larisa; an old man is looking for someone to hire to guard the corpse. A young man, who happened to be there, wanted to find out why it was all that necessary to guard corpses. The answer he got from the passers-by was that there were many witches threatening to harm and bite the flesh from the faces of the dead. Further on, he continued his questioning concerning the wake:

Contra ego: “Et quae, tu” inquam “dic sodes, custodela ista feralis?” “Iam primum” respondit ille “perpetem noctem eximie vigilandum est exsertis et inconivis oculis semper in cadaver intentis nec acies usquam devertenda, immo ne obliquanda quidem, quippe cum deterrimae versipelles in quodvis animal ore converso latenter adrepant, ut ipsos etiam oculos Solis et Iustitiae facile frustrentur; nam et aves et rursum canes et mures immo vero etiam muscas induunt. Tunc diris cantaminibus somno custodes obruunt. Nec satis quisquam definire poterit quantas latebras nequissimae mulieres pro libidine sua comminiscuntur. Nec tamen huius tam exitiabilis operae merces amplior quam quaterni vel seni ferme offeruntur aurei. Ehem, et quod paene praeterieram, siqui non integrum corpus mane restituerit, quidquid indedecrptum deminutumque fuerit, id omne de facie sua desecto sarcire compellitur.”

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<sup>21</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 426-427. Greek text and English translation based on A.T. Murray. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

Then quoth I, in good fellowship tell me the order of this custody and how it is. Marry (quoth he) first you must watch all the night, with your eyes bent continually upon the Corps, never looking off, nor moving aside. For these Witches doe turn themselves into sundry kindes of beasts, whereby they deceive the eyes of all men, sometimes they are transformed into birds, sometimes into Dogs and Mice, and sometimes into flies. Moreover, they will charme the keepers of the corps asleepe, neither can it be declared what meanes and shifts these wicked women do use, to bring their purpose to passe: and the reward for such dangerous watching is no more than foure or sixe shillings. But hearken further (which I had well nigh forgotten) if the keeper of the dead body doe not render on the morning following, the corps whole and sound as he received the same, he shall be punished in this sort: That is, if the corps bee diminished or spoyled in any part of his face, hands or toes, the same shall be diminished and spoiled in the keeper.<sup>22</sup>

The job of guarding the corpse is represented here as a professional duty that is necessary as a measurement of protection against the dark forces and magic of evil witches. It is important to remember that in Antiquity, the area of Thessaly was more famous for witchcraft, wizards and magic, than any other area of the Greek world. In spite of this specificity, we should not ignore this fragment, especially in light of the fact that practice in Serbia of a much later period relating to this ritual stage reveals remarkable parallels. During the night, it was necessary that somebody should stay awake and take care that the eyes and mouth of the dead did not open. The reason for this is that during the night souls can easily wander around, and the soul of the dead person could go out and turn into a

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<sup>22</sup> Apuleius, *Mentamorphoses*, 2, 22. Latin text from the Latin Library website: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/apuleius.html>; English translation by Adlington, ed. by Martin Guy 1996, at <http://books.eserver.org/fiction/apuleius/notes.html>.

vampire.<sup>23</sup> Parallels are obvious – animals represent a threat to the corpse – either destroying it (as according to Greek belief), or turning it into a demonic evil creature dangerous to the living.<sup>24</sup> According to Veselin Čajkanović, the Serbian paradigm, although appearing some twenty centuries after the Greek case (it is still found in some rural areas in Serbia) is actually closer to the older beliefs than the Thessalian example that is confirmed in literary source of Apuleius. He moves us back to the above mentioned custom of keeping the jaws shut. Namely, the danger of the animals referred to above lies in fact that they are believed to be related to, and “inhabited” by, the souls of the dead. If such an animal crosses or jumps over the corpse, and orifices have been left open, the soul from the animal can move to the corpse and thus, after some time, this dead person would become harmful.<sup>25</sup> When death happens, the corpse itself embodies danger and it has to be treated with much respect and care, not only for its own good, but also for the benefit of the living.

Another ritual practice during the wake, the function of which is to confront death through the display and expression of grief, is lamentation. Paintings on Attic and Athenian funerary vases and plaques offer detailed images of the scene: the father stands at some distance from the corpse to greet guests who arrive to pay their last respects and to take part in the funerary procession. At the same time, kinswomen stand around the bier.<sup>26</sup> A woman who has the leading role in lamentation (a mother, a wife, or a sister) stands by the head of the deceased. On numerous vase representations, the chief mourner tries to clasp the head of the dead man with both hands, while the others try to reach and touch his hand, stretching

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<sup>23</sup> Čajkanović 1994, 2, 219.

<sup>24</sup> Vampires in Serbian tradition are the dead that after forty days start to get up from the grave during the night, in order to harm people, kill them, or drink their blood. See Karadžić 1852, s.v. *vukodlak*.

<sup>25</sup> Čajkanović 1994, 2, 220-221.

<sup>26</sup> Zschietzschmann 1928, 17-36.

their right hands over him.<sup>27</sup> Frequently the hands of mourners are raised above their heads, sometimes even beating their heads and pulling out the hair.<sup>28</sup> These acts of self-violation were not only acts of uncontrolled grief, but also part of the ritual closely related to lamentation.<sup>29</sup> However, vase images do not reveal anything more but the fact that women's role was dominant in this complex ritual praxis, which appeared to be the domain in which women could freely and publicly express not only their grief, but also their own standpoints. However, legislative regulations of Solon, were aimed at removing women's lamentation from the public spaces, damping their voices.<sup>30</sup> For the moment I will skip this interesting subject to which I later devote significantly a whole chapter.

### 3) Ekphora – funeral procession

During antiquity, the duration of *prothêsis* changed through time. And while the body of Hector was burned on the ninth day and Achilles' body on the eighteenth day, the law of Solon prescribed that the *prothêsis* should last until the morning of the third day, when the procession – *ekphora* – started from the house of the deceased.<sup>31</sup> However, the data concerning the time of *ekphora* do not always agree completely, and there is a certain degree of doubt concerning the best way to calculate it. According to Demosthenes, the funeral procession took place in the morning, on the day after the wake, and if the wake was held on the day after death, than it was the third morning. Because of the fact that sources do vary a lot on this issue,

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<sup>27</sup> CVA 80.3.

<sup>28</sup> CVA 80.1-3, 81.1-2, 84.1.

<sup>29</sup> Alexiou 2002, 6.

<sup>30</sup> The phenomenon of restrictive laws regarding funerals was characteristic for all Greek poleis. More about this is presented in the chapter on Control of the Funeral Rituals.

<sup>31</sup> Demosthenes, 43, 62.

Margaret Alexiou suggests that the duration of the wake was not always the same in all periods and places of the Greek world. However, it is possible to claim that in Athens and, in general, during the period of late antiquity, a procession was held on the third day.<sup>32</sup>

Before the law prescribed a quiet procession that could take place very early in the morning, *ekphora* used to be sumptuous public event. Although the law of Solon forbade loud processions and restricted the number of women who could participate, black-figured *kantharoi* from the fifth century reveal men leading the procession and carrying the corpse, and women following them, lamenting.<sup>33</sup> Earlier evidence, from the geometric period, confirms that this ritual stage used to be a magnificent public affair. The bier was carried on a wagon drawn by horses, and followed by the closest female kin, professional mourners and armed men.<sup>34</sup> Although not so luxurious, there is evidence of a procession with a cart even in the classical period (however, this stage of ritual is evidenced only rarely on the vases of the period). Two black-figured painted plaques show two ways of transporting the bier in the procession: on the first one the corpse is carried along in a cart, while the second vase reveals a cortège with pall-bearers.<sup>35</sup> After arriving at the site of the grave, the body was lowered into the ground.<sup>36</sup> This stage of ritual was also

<sup>32</sup> Alexiou 207 f. 30. Sources for *ekphora* are Demosthenes 43, 62; Thucydides 2, 34; Scholia Aristophanes *Lys.* 612; Plato, *Laws* 959a; Plutarch, *Numa* 22; Philostrates, *VA* 3, 88; Antiphones *Chor.* 34.

<sup>33</sup> Paris, Bibl. Nat. 353, 355 from Vulci. Athenian black-figured one-handled *kantharoi*, showing funerals.

<sup>34</sup> Athens 806 represents a large crater with a sepulchral function revealing the procession of chariots and mourners, around 750 BC 803 is large sepulchral amphora belonging to the same period, revealing the dead man on a horse-drawn chariot and followed by mourners; 10862 is a geometric amphora showing a hoplite procession, from the period around 750-700 BC cf. Alexiou 2002, 207. Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 65.

<sup>35</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, Pl., 34, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Concerning the praxis of burial in the classical period, people of Attica practiced both cremation and inhumation. As in the former periods (both praxes

subjected to the changes concerning the abundance of sacrifices. Solon explicitly forbade sacrificing an ox at the grave. Another form of sacrifice used to be usual at the grave. Namely, according to Cicero, in the time of Kerkops, the legendary founder of Athens, it was usual to undertake a simple ceremony of sowing the earth with the fruits of its bounty (*frugibus obserebatur*) over the grave shaft.<sup>37</sup> Kurtz and Boardman interpret this as an act of assuring the dead a quiet repose. This also might be understood as an act of purifying the land, thus ensuring a practical function in the world of the living. From another point of view, sowing the land in which the dead are placed, undoubtedly associates the dead with fertilisation and the powers that bring rebirth.

The question that can be posed is whether lamentation was customary also at this stage of the ritual. If we take into consideration the restrictive laws that insisted on silence during the *ekphora*, we can conclude that originally, as well as during this ritual stage, there was some lamentation. However, the words that are used in this context testify more strongly to wailing and uttering unarticulated sounds, than to creative lamentation.<sup>38</sup> Also, an image on a black-figured *kuathos* shows a lament with an *aulos* accompaniment performed at the procession.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, one paragraph of Gamberion law, that women's clothes should remain

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were widespread from the Protogeometric period), the choice of burial was a matter of personal or family choice. Only in Hellenistic period did the praxis of inhumation become more common. Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 51, 163.

<sup>37</sup> Cicero, *De legibus*, 2, 25, 63.

<sup>38</sup> *ōtotuzein* which according to *LSJ* means "to wail aloud" in *LGS* 74C; also *ƒqeggesqai*, which means to utter a sound or voice in *LSJ*, found in Plato, *Laws* 959e, 960a.

<sup>39</sup> Paris Bibl. Nat. 355 (Zschietzchmann B 15.92). The consensus among archaeologists, Mycenologists and the specialists in the field of anthropology and death in antiquity is that the earliest evidences of women with hands raised are those showing women lamenting, which go back to the Mycenaean painted *larnakes* (coffins) and the earliest vases of the Dipylon period. Vermeule 1965, 123-148, Iakovidis 1966, 43-50. Cf. Alexiou 1971, 6.

undefiled, implies that during the procession, lamentation and the rending of garments continued.<sup>40</sup> Another law, the one proscribed in Delphi, bans wailing during *ekphora* but permits it at the tomb, limiting, however, the number of female kin that can take part.<sup>41</sup>

Concerning the moment of burying the dead, there is evidence from the black-figured *loutrophoros* from the period around 500 BC. The image of this vase reveals the following: the coffin with the corpse is being laid into the tomb; two men are standing in the dug out grave, underneath the coffin, stretching out their hands to receive it; on both sides of the coffin are two other men, who are lowering it. Behind them come women lamenting. The reverse side of the vase reveals a burial mound marked by *loutrophoros* receiving homage from two women.<sup>42</sup> Kurtz and Boardman mention unpublished funeral scenes in which oil bottles and eggs are carried to the grave.<sup>43</sup> There is no doubt that the distribution of duties between women and men during this stage of the ritual was as follows: the men's duty was to carry the bier and to bury it, while women were lamenting and wailing, of course only as much as was allowed and prescribed by laws.

#### 4) Sacrifices on the grave and in the cult of the dead

Offerings at the tomb dedicated to the spirits of the dead were made on the third (*ta trita*), ninth (*ta ennata*) and fortieth days,

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<sup>40</sup> Sokolowski 1955, no.16.5-6. cf. Alexiou 2002, 7.

<sup>41</sup> *LGS* 74C, 218.

<sup>42</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, Pl. 36.

<sup>43</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 149. This evidence is interesting in the light of the Serbian ritual of carrying eggs to the grave at Easter. It is still possible to find this custom occasionally even in the urban areas, in Belgrade. My informant, S.Đ., told me that she carries eggs every Easter to the grave of her parents. She told me also that every time she visits their grave, she takes some food with her, sits there and eats it. When she goes with her family, in the morning, they buy something nice in the nearby bakery and have a breakfast at the grave.

after one year and afterwards regularly during the annual festivities for the dead.<sup>44</sup> Numerous vase-paintings, especially on the Attic white-ground *lekithoi*, reflect scenes of grieving and the giving of offerings to the dead.<sup>45</sup> From the mid-fifth century, such scenes became more common than those of the former period, representing *prothêsis*.<sup>46</sup>

Mourners used to dedicate a lock of hair and to pour out libations (*choai*) – wine, oils and perfumes, accompanying this action with prayer.<sup>47</sup> Then followed *enagismata* that consisted of milk, water, honey, wine, celery and two mixtures – first, a combination of wheat, honey and oil called *pelanos* and the other made out of the first-fruits crops with dried and fresh fruits – *kolluba*.<sup>48</sup> After the law of Solon that forbade bull-sacrifices, the

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<sup>44</sup> Although references for such rituals are quite frequent in literature (Aristophanes *Lysistrata*, 611-613, Iseus 2, 36; Iseus, 8, 39, Aeschin 3, 225), we actually lack the information how the days were counted – in the case of *ta trita* and *ta êhnata*, whether from the day of death or of burial. Kurtz and Boardman suggest that the day of the death was taken into consideration, in which case *ta trita* was organised immediately after the burial. *Ibid.* 1971, 145.

<sup>45</sup> Lekythoi are little receptacles for oil that were offered to the dead as votive gifts.

<sup>46</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 100-102, 203-213.

<sup>47</sup> Hair offering: A. *Ch.* 6-7, S. *El.* 51-53, 448-458; libation: A. *Ch.* 129-131, 149-151, 164, 166, 486-488, E. *IT* 158-169, 633, Ar. *fr.* 488. 12-14; Peek 428, 1157, 1422, 1970, *LGS* 93A. Cf. Alexiou 2002, 7. Inevitably, the liquid used both as libation and as a drink during the funeral feast and festivities devoted to the dead was wine, a drink, which is commonly associated with blood in antiquity, but also in the Christian tradition.

<sup>48</sup> An offering of milk and honey is mentioned in *Il.* XXIII, 170, *Od.* XI, 27, A. *P.* 612, Eur. *Or.* 115. Honey-cake is mentioned by Aristophanes in *Lys.* 601. *Kolluba* is mentioned by Hesch. s.v. *kolluba*, Thuc. 3,58,4. Aeschylus mentions in *Persians*, 607-622. Apart from food and drink, Greeks used also to sacrifice some objects from everyday usage – lyres, pipes, ribbons, lamps, clothes. Cf. Alexiou 2002, 8.

usual animal sacrifice included sheep, lambs, young goats or birds.<sup>49</sup> However, the restriction of bull-sacrifices did not refer to the funeral rituals, which were organised by the polis.<sup>50</sup> Such exceptions seem logical if we take into account that restrictions of Solon's law were actually aimed at controlling funerals that were organised by family members, limiting their public importance, luxury and expression of joy, trying to restrict them into the limits of a household and to weaken their social importance. Namely, as Emily Vermeule states for the pre-Solonian period "a good funeral has always been a lot of fun, a reunion stirring open emotions and bringing news to exchange, the periodic intersection to the family, the clan and the city."<sup>51</sup> However, despite the legislation that Solon introduced, the necessity for controlling burials appeared again in the Hellenistic period.<sup>52</sup> Namely, according to the *Mramor Parium* in the year 317/316 BC, Demetrius of Phaleron passed legislation that placed limitations on several aspects of Athenian life, but also on their funeral rituals.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, there is not much difference in the funeral ritual practices of Hellenistic and classical periods. The only innovation is that among sacrifices, i.e. the deposits found in coffins or urns, we come across *obols*, presumably "Charon's fee" that became customary from this period all the way up to nowadays.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For Solo's law see Plutarch, *Solon*, 21, 2. For animal sacrifices: Pausanias, V, 43, 3, Euripides, *Electra*, 92. Archaeological evidences in Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 215-216.

<sup>50</sup> About abundant funeral offerings with a bull sacrifice that once a year Plateans dedicated to the members of the Athenian alliance who had died in the battle of Plateas. Plutarch, *Aristides*, 21, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Vermeule 1984, 3.

<sup>52</sup> This, of course raises a question – to what extent was a law of Solon appreciated and accepted. I will return to this issue again in the context of the early Byzantine period. Namely, comments of the patristic fathers and advisors for moderate Christian funerals address and confirm the same unbridled behaviour that Solon tried to uproot and change.

<sup>53</sup> These laws were written down by Cicero. See *De legibus*.

<sup>54</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 163, Pl. 40.

To return to libations: this type of offering, that is impossible to withdraw (what is once poured is impossible to retrieve), in Antique literary and archaeological sources usually represents a drink dedicated to the thirsty dead.<sup>55</sup> One of the examples is the Attic black-figured amphora from the late sixth century BC that shows small winged figures (*psuchai*) serving drink to the parched newcomer to the Underworld.<sup>56</sup> Apart from milk, water and wine, we also come across oil that is actually not drinkable (though its anointing function in the context of bathing might be understandable) and, compared to other libations, its stains remain visible for quite a long time.<sup>57</sup> According to Walter Burkert and his interpretation of libations as a way of making a mark, oil traces might, due to their persistence, represent a kind of evidence witnessing visits to the grave by the family members.<sup>58</sup> And truly, oil is the evidence that lasts longest. The confirmation of the hypothesis that offerings might also be messages for the living exists in Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra*, where the presence of Orestes was announced by the offerings that he left at Agamemnon's grave: fresh blood of a sacrificed ram and, what is particularly important, the lock of Orestes' hair was a sign for Electra, witnessing her brother's presence.<sup>59</sup> The old man in Euripides' drama advises Electra to compare her own hair with that on the grave, since their hair must be alike because of the same paternal origin:

**skeyai de; caitĥn prostiqei sash, komh/  
eij crwma tauton kourimh- eĥtai tricos-:  
filei gar, aiĥna tauton oiĥ aĥ h/ patrōv,  
ta ; pol IV oĥnoia swmto- pefukenai.**

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<sup>55</sup> About the thirsty dead: Greeks called their dead – *oil diyamenoī oil abrecoi* – “those who are thirsty” Dietrich 1893, 100; about libations for bathing: Sophocles, *Electra* 84, 434; Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 149-161.

<sup>56</sup> Vermeule 1984, 59, fig. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Its existence in funeral ritual is evidenced by numerous *lekuthoi*.

<sup>58</sup> Burkert 1979, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Sophocles, *Electra*, 893-905; Euripides, *Electra*, 513-523.

Go look to see if the color of the cut lock is the same as yours,  
putting it to your own hair;  
It is usual for those who have the same paternal blood  
To have a close resemblance in many features.<sup>60</sup>

The lock of hair left on the grave as part of one's body represents the corporeal offering that the closest kin sacrifice to their dead. Regarding the fact that Homer mentions the existence of human sacrifices in the funeral ritual context – namely Achilles killed twelve Trojans for his dead friend Patroklos – the sacrifice of hair should be understood as a trace – as a *pars pro toto* of the human victim.<sup>61</sup>

Examples in the tragedies thus point to a twofold aspect of sacrifices on the grave. On one hand, the offering in general communicates with those at whom it is aimed – gods, heroes or the dead. On the other, in a certain social context, it communicates with the living. In that sense, locks of hair on Agamemnon's grave in Euripides' and Sophocles' dramas represent a form of mediation between the living. Symbolically, communication is directed from the living Orestes to his dead father and from the dead Agamemnon to the living Electra.

However, one of the main functions of all the offerings in the cult of the dead was for one's own benefit – to appease the souls of the dead, which, continuing their existence in the underworld, influenced the life of the living. However, material from tragedies also reveals the reverse situation. Namely, in Aeschylus' tragedy *Libation Bearers*, Electra and Orestes, planning to kill Aegisthus, blackmail dead Agamemnon: unless he helps them, they would deprive him of the offerings that he deserves as one of the dead:

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<sup>60</sup> Euripides, *Electra*, 519-522. Greek text ed. by Gilbert Murry, English translation by E.P. Coleridge. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>61</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 20.

Ὀρέστε-:

οὐτῶ γὰρ ἂν σοὶ δαΐτε- εἰνομὸι βροτῶν  
κτιζοίατ' εἰς δὲ μῆ; παρ' εὐδείπνοι- εἶσθ/  
ἀίτιμο- ἐμπυροῖσι κνίστωι- σπονῶν

Orestes:

Yes, for then the customary funeral feasts of men  
would be established in your honor.

But otherwise, at the rich and savory banquet of burnt  
offerings made to the earth,  
you will be without a portion of honor.<sup>62</sup>

Let me focus briefly on the way in which sacrifices were performed at funerals and in general in the cult of the dead. The procedure concerning animals (*sphagia*) involved the following: the animal was first slaughtered and then burned. In the cult of the dead there was no altar for this kind of sacrifice, and animals were sacrificed on the top of a pit (*bothros*) so that the blood could flow into the earth. Thus, Odysseus, on the advice of Circe, first dug a wide pit and then poured out a libation in honey, wine, and water, and slaughtered a ram and a black sheep. The blood that leaked into the underworld was drunk by the souls, enabling them to regain consciousness, at least for a while.<sup>63</sup>

The offerings were never sacrificed in a quiet atmosphere, but, the same as during *prothesis*, the sacrifice was followed by wailing and lamenting. The images on vase-paintings reveal mourners approaching with their gifts: usually they appear in twos; one of them is always a woman, followed sometimes by a man who enters from the right side, sometimes on a horse.<sup>64</sup> Approaching the tomb, the woman puts the offerings on the grave and starts to pray, either kneeling down with her right arm outstretched, or standing

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<sup>62</sup> Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, 483-485. Greek and English texts ed. by Herbert Weir Smyth. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>63</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, X, 517-537; XI, 23-50.

<sup>64</sup> Athens 1982, 1825, 12959.

with the right arm in the same position and using the left hand for tearing her loosened hair.<sup>65</sup>

This stage of the ritual directly develops into the next one. Although sacrificial offerings were dedicated to the dead, at the same time they represented a part of the feast due to the dead.<sup>66</sup> But before I move to the issue of a funeral feast, I would say something about the pollution related to death and rituals.

## 5) Ritual purification of Miasma

It has already been mentioned that all who attended the funeral and came to the funeral feast held in the household of the deceased, had to wash or bathe themselves before starting to eat.<sup>67</sup> This praxis was not an ordinary act, but an act with ritual significance, related to ritual impurity – *miasma* that follows death and any contact with the dead and the underworld that funeral ritual implies.<sup>68</sup> *Miasma* spreads from the corpse, affecting not only people but also spaces. The house where somebody died was considered polluted, or, if it happened in a public place, that also was tainted. This might be the reason why the graveyards of the fifth century were located outside the city walls. However, intramural hero tombs were usually not considered to be polluted. Another exception was

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<sup>65</sup> *CVA* 86, 43, 96.8.

<sup>66</sup> Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, 483.

<sup>67</sup> It was not obligatory that purifying bath for mourners followed funerary immediately. *LSCG* 97 A 30, *LSCG* 124.4 At least early attestations for this are missing. Parker 1983, 36. K. Meuli mentions that dirty water in which the mourners have washed, had been brought to the dead as the offering. Meuli 1945, 205 n. 1, source Cleidemus *ap. Athn* 410 1 (323 *FGrH* fr. 14). Sometimes even pouring libations on the funerals were understood to have purifying function Plat. *Min.* 315 c, Schol.

<sup>68</sup> Parker 1983, 32-70.

the battlefield – soldiers or public enemies were believed not to spread pollution around the place where they fell down.<sup>69</sup>

Concerning the house in which the corpse was exposed, it was subjected to purification, and according to Iulius' law, this was achieved by sprinkling the house with sea water on the morning after the corpse was carried out, which meant on the third day after death.<sup>70</sup> There is also evidence for a preliminary purification of the living at the grave. Namely, in the fragment from *Exegetikon* by Atthidographer Kleidemos, there is a description of a ritual of digging a pit to the west of the grave.<sup>71</sup> This pit was filled with water and wine and words of prayer were spoken. The water that was poured into this pit is termed *aponimma* and this leads to the conclusion that it was used for purifying.

There was no common pan-Hellenic norm that referred to *miasma* in terms of how long it lasted and what the practices were for removing it. Although funerary pollution was evidently known in Athens, literary texts are short of details referring to it. Therefore, the main fifth century source for this discussion is the law by Iulius of Keos.<sup>72</sup>

One of the common Greek practices of the funeral rite was to mark a house polluted by death with a water jar, as a token of recent death that gave information to all those people who, not being close to the deceased, did not want to become polluted.<sup>73</sup> The water used to be fetched from the neighbouring house, which was actually

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>70</sup> *LSCG* 97A 14 -17. Appended to Iulius law was a further regulation about pollution that lasted longer, for as long as the rituals after the funeral lasted, which sometimes gradually increased over time. *LSCG* 97 B1 – 11. For home purification at Athens see Antiphon, *Choreutes* 37; Demosthenes, 47, 70. House is not impure, if there was not death in it. Euripides, *Helen*, 1430.

<sup>71</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 150.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Euripides, *Alcestis* 98-99; Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazousae*, 1033.

a way of providing a purifying remedy from an unpolluted source.<sup>74</sup> It is not clear whether sprinkling from this vessel was the only purification process that was sufficient for removing *miasma*, or whether other practices were also necessary.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, practice of borrowing was common at the end of the mourning ceremony in Argos, which was marked with the fire brought from the house next door.<sup>76</sup>

It is important to notice that polluted persons were excluded from social life, especially from going to temples or participating in ritual gatherings, in order to prevent pollution of the sacred places, i.e. gods.<sup>77</sup> Analysis of the funeral ritual has shown that the role of women in the ritual was more prominent than the role of men, whereby women were more subjected to ritual impurity. Humphreys suggests that precisely this exposure to impurity was the main reason for men to stay away from funeral rituals, since more intensive participation would have prevented them from returning quickly to their roles in public life.<sup>78</sup> So, through avoiding ritual impurity, men condemned women to it instead, but by doing this, they actually gave women the privilege of acquiring power over the dead. And, as we

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<sup>74</sup> Pollux 8. 65; Hesychius s.v. *oḡstrakon*.

<sup>75</sup> Parker 1983, 35. In relation to the ritual impurity follows the death is also the custom of the depositing of *kallusmata* (sweepings from the house) on the grave. Namely, women collected all kinds of refuse from the house and took it to the grave. The function of this was to purge the pollution from the house of the deceased. This custom was held on the thirtieth day after the funeral – *triekostia* was banned in the sixth century. Though the Solonian law does not mention it, there were probably laws aimed against this kind of ritual. Apart from being related to funerals, this custom was also held on a monthly basis when the deposits were left on the Hekate's cross and were known as 'Hekate's suppers'. A *Ch.* 98, Sch.; Ar. *Pl.* 596 Sch.; Poll. 5. 163; Plu. *Mor.* 708-9; Ath. 325a; Thphr. *Char.* 16.7. Cf Alexiou 2002, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 24. 297a.

<sup>77</sup> Apollo runs away when Alecestis prepares to die. Euripides, *Alcestis*, 20 – 23.

<sup>78</sup> Humphreys 1996, 154.

will see in the chapters that follow – having power over the dead brings also power over the living.

Exclusion due to ritual impurity did not only endanger those who were in direct physical contact with the recently deceased. Namely, if somebody died far away from home, the family of that person was obliged to mourn him, even if they could not bury the corpse. And, of course, participation in such a ritual, also caused pollution.<sup>79</sup> But the real problem arose if it turned out after some time that the mourned person was actually still alive. Namely, after once being mourned, it was impossible for someone to regain their status in the world of the living, although physical existence was unquestionable. Such people were considered impure and nobody wanted to associate with them.<sup>80</sup> These impure people were also forbidden to enter temples. However, a ritual was devised in Delphi that enabled reintegration of such people into the community.<sup>81</sup> So, in case of those who were only considered dead, *miasma* was caused by a funeral ritual performed at the moment when the community considered them dead. This ritual had to enable their proper departure from the world of living. So, even when it turned out that they had actually stayed alive, their place could not be guaranteed and returned to them anymore. This matter reveals that social and ritual dimensions overpowered the physical ones, wherefore, Parker's argumentation that *miasma* in funeral ritual (as well as rituals of birth) is directly related to the biological forces of human life – at both the beginning and in its end – does not hold.

What then is the nature of *miasma*? Is it purely physical, coming from contact with the corpse, or is it social, affecting all family members? Or is it something different? Why was a simple act of cleansing not enough for purification, but a certain period of time

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<sup>79</sup> Although this is clear for Archaic Greece, the evidences for the fifth century period is not clear.

<sup>80</sup> About falsely reported death, see Euripides, *Helen*, 1058 and Sophocles, *Electra*, 58-64.

<sup>81</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, 264f-265a.

had to pass, before the one affected by impurity could return to normal life? And why did it affect places as well, not only people? The physical state, argues Vernant, is not sufficient to assume a religious significance.<sup>82</sup> And although purification is also effected through physical operations such as cleansing with water, it operates on another plane. It is not only that death and the rituals around it provoke impurity. *Miasma* (though in the milder form) follows another annual commemoration devoted to the dead. Especially significant apotropaic measurements were taken at Anthesteria, when the dead souls returned to earth.<sup>83</sup> So, *miasma* always follows communication between the world beyond and this world. It is about violation of the normal order, about communicating with the underworld and about removing from danger all those who were in contact with the beyond and who thus become dangerously impure. It appears either in the physical, or in the social sphere, it is determined by a certain place and time and it is always related to the ritual context.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Vernant 1992, 129.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 39; cf. Deubner 112

<sup>84</sup> Regarding ritual impurity in relation to death in the Serbian tradition, the common elements are easily noticeable. It is believed that contact with the death causes impurity, and after a funeral, it is necessary to be cleansed. The threat of ritual impurity is present always when the souls of dead people are free to move, during the night, or during periods of their festivities. The main means for purification are water and fire. Sometimes just one of them is used, sometimes both. First, hands are cleaned above the fire or embers are taken in the hands, and after that, hands are washed. As among the Greeks, ritual impurity is a cause for removal from the cultic practices. Čajkanović 1994 5, 63-65. Interestingly, the old term for ritual impurity is the word *greh* that in contemporary language means “sin”, an offence against the religious and moral norm. This old Slavic word was at first used not to term moral or religious mistakes in the deeper sense, but only material mistakes. Ibid.

## 6) Perideipnon – funeral feast: (En)joy the funeral?

The final act of the funeral ritual, which marked the end of the mourning and wailing, was a feast – *perideipnon*, *kathedra*. Funeral feasts were shared by all the dead person’s relatives around the hearth of his house. They were held on the third, fifth, ninth and fortieth day after death, and then after one year regularly on the festivities devoted to the dead – *Nekusia* on the second and third day of the *Anthesteria* festival, as well as on the festival dedicated to the ancestors – *Genesia* on the fifth of *Boedromion*. On these days people decorated the graves, sacrificed offerings and ate specific kinds of food, believing that the dead were visiting them during those days.<sup>85</sup> In the geometric period, the feast was organised at the grave, while the food was prepared in a pit near the graveyards.<sup>86</sup> In the period that followed, after introduction of the restrictive laws, the usual place for the feast was around the hearth of a dead man’s home.<sup>87</sup> So the procedure was as follows: after the final libation that preceded the burial (the corpse was either burnt or buried), the procession went back home. Both the closest kin and those who attended the funeral washed themselves in order to purify themselves after contact (direct or indirect) with the deceased and before the meal.<sup>88</sup> The feast could then start, as well as the talking and recalling of memories about the dead. Unlike during lamentation, when lamenters were focused on facing and expressing feelings of sorrow and mourning, the words said about the deceased on the occasion of funeral feasts were always words of praise:

**ton teqnhota mh; kakoloein**

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<sup>85</sup> Particularly significant are the grave relief representations of funeral feasts, the so-called Totenmahl relieves, very often in Attics after the late fourth century.

<sup>86</sup> See also Homer, XXIV 665-882 and Hesiod, 763f.

<sup>87</sup> Photius s.v. *kaqetra*, cf. RE 720 s.v. *perideipnon*.

<sup>88</sup> Parker 1983, 36; Garland 1990, 44, 147-148.

All the best about the dead.<sup>89</sup>

This is acknowledged in the proverb cited by Zenobius about someone so bad, that he was not praised even on such an occasion:

**ouk epa jeqein- ouj j ejh perideipnw/ (Eijwqesan  
gar oil palaioi; ejh toi- periodeipnoi- ton  
teleuthsanta epainein, kai; eij faulo- hh)**

Nor at the feast they praised him (the old used to praise the dead during the feast, even though he was an unworthy person).<sup>90</sup>

Speaking of the dead during the funeral feast apparently used to have to some extent a witty tone. For instance, there was the ancient Greek proverb: *epidekia legein ... wspani; teqnhkoti* (to speak cleverly, as of the dead), which implies some kind of humour and witty improvisation in the context of this stage of the funeral ritual.<sup>91</sup>

But let me go back to the ancient Greek material that points to the existence of laughter and humour at the funeral. A fragment

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<sup>89</sup> Diogenes Laertius, I, 3, 70.

<sup>90</sup> Zenobius, *Proverbia*, 5, 28.

<sup>91</sup> Anaxandrides *fr.* 1, Edmonds 1961, 2.444. Margaret Alexiou even argues that the genre of *elegoi* actually belongs to the sympotic genre on the occasion of funeral feasts, when the men praised the dead. See more in chapter 6, Alexiou 2002. Related to this is the information given by Herodotus about the custom among Thracians who buried the dead with joy, making jokes. An interesting comparison is the complete description of the Thracian custom related to birth and grieving for all the troubles that a child has to face in its future life. Herodotus V, 4 – 8. Thracians used to have several wives and it was an honour for them to be chosen from among the others, killed and buried with her dead husband. However, in the description that follows it is clear that apart from the joyful atmosphere, Thracians performed the funeral ritual with the same sequence of events as Greeks, making abundant sacrifices, funeral feasts, games and of course lamentation.

from the New Comedy by Hegesippos (Hellenistic period) illustrates a cook boasting about his culinary skills, who prepares such tasteful food for *perideipnon* that all mourners smile and chuckle, just like at a wedding.<sup>92</sup> This fragment points to the joyful character of this stage of the ritual, revealing the resemblance between funeral and wedding ritual that I am going to analyse in one of the following chapters, and it does, after all, point to convivial atmosphere of feasting and enjoying a good meal, which was inevitably followed with wine at Greek funerals. Besides at funerals, drunkenness also appears in the underworld.<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, the fragment mentioned above also evokes a Modern Greek parallel from Pontos. This is about the ritual custom during the wake at which women guard the corpse. At this stage of the ritual, it is the custom to laugh and say: “There is never funeral without a joy, nor a wedding without a tear.”<sup>94</sup> I have heard a similar saying from an informant from Rača (N.M.) who was describing a long and very cheerful funeral feast where people were “so drunk and amused as if they were at some wedding, not at the funeral.” This diachronic material testifies not only to laughter in the funerary context, but reveals the identical syntagmatic pattern in which a good mood at a funeral is compared that at a wedding and vice versa.

The enjoyment of food and the good mood and laughter that followed, fit into the interpretation of eating as an act of confirmation and manifestation of life. The inherent relationship between the grave and food is also pointed out in Roman sources. *Culina* used to be the place where the meal was sacrificed for the dead. From this word *culinary* is derived and all the words grouped around the same family that in many modern languages denote skills

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<sup>92</sup> Hegesippos, *Adelphoi*, 11-16. Another mention of the same kind of enjoyable funeral feast that can bring to laughter those in sorrow, is made by the same author at Athenus VII 290 c.

<sup>93</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 2, 363, c. Aristophanes, *Fragmenta*, 488, 6.

<sup>94</sup> Politis 1930, 3.330, cf. Alexiou 2002, 42. The same expression also appears in folk songs.

of cookery and many concepts related to gastronomy. However, its place in the ritual should be related to the stage of thought of Greek tribes, which Olga Freidenberg terms “prelogic thought”, which I have already elaborated upon in the introduction. In the light of Freidenberg’s theory, feasting at the funeral is a trace of the undivided concept of life and death. After all, it is the same collective meal that appears in other rituals of passage – on the occasion of birth and marriage. The metaphor of death becomes equated with the metaphor of life or rebirth, which is testified in numerous myths about parents killing and eating their own children (Chronos, Procne, Tantalus).<sup>95</sup> The metaphor of eating connects the mentioned metaphors – it is killing, the interiorisation of the killed person who is in the totemic concept of the world identified with the divine, and it is the irrevocable revival. In the act of eating, rebirth is guaranteed to everyone – to those who are eating and to the eaten one.<sup>96</sup>

The question that is posed is why the funeral feast is performed almost at the end of the ritual, after the burial. To understand this, it is necessary consider the division point of tears and laughter. Namely, in the early cognition, “laughter and tears both appeared as metaphors of death in the two phases – rebirth and dying – nothing else.”<sup>97</sup> Only later, laughter and tears became separated, which also became reflected in the division within the funeral ritual. It is possible to say that all stages of the funerary rite became separated into two main phases – mourning (from the moment of death until the deceased is buried in the grave) is followed by feasting with drunkenness, praising of the dead, musical performances, dancing, and singing. The only innovation, claims Freidenberg, was the introduction of contests: throwing a ball, a

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<sup>95</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 459; Apollodorus, III, 14, 8; Pindar, *Olympian*, I, 50.

<sup>96</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 64.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

discus and a spear, horse-riding or cart-riding.<sup>98</sup> The same as the funeral games, the feast that precedes it, embodies a contest between life and death.<sup>99</sup>

The ritual pattern of laughter during the feast which marked the end of the mourning stages of funerary ritual can be related to the end of Demeter's mourning for her daughter Persephone. Demeter's laughter coincided with her decision to end her rejection of food. Namely, Demeter, in sorrow for her daughter, who had been abducted by Hades, not only refused to eat anything, but also, as the goddess of Earth fertility, caused all plants and everything edible that made human life possible, to die out. Even Niobe, after she had mourned her dead children, remembered to eat.<sup>100</sup>

A funeral feast thus represents the end of mourning and loud lamentation, at least during the first, most intensive stage of the funeral rite itself. This is confirmed by numerous parallels, even biblical cases in which food and drink are represented as a comfort to the mourners.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, rituals related to the funeral extend to the occasions of the ninth, and fortieth (thirtieth) days, and one year.<sup>102</sup> The end of mourning was marked with an additional ceremony, though in Athens, during archaic or classical periods, the length of this period was not prescribed.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 176 Homer, *Odyssey*, VIII, 109. It is necessary to emphasize the agonal dimension that embodies life-giving and life-conquering forces that are being awakened in this ritual context.

<sup>99</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 134.

<sup>100</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV 602-603.

<sup>101</sup> II Samuel, 3: 35; Jeremiah, 16: 7.

<sup>102</sup> On the ninth day after the burial, family and friends gathered at the tomb to perform the customary rite. However, except from the information that ritual praxis was usually carried out on this day, we lack any detailed description or information about it. Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 147.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

The meal after the funeral was not therefore, the end of feasting in honour of the dead, but continued periodically. Following Solon's legislation, individual celebrations of the "birthday" of the dead were substituted with collective festivals. However, the annual festivities devoted to the dead were numerous. Apart from *Genesia*, *Nekysia* and *Anthesteria*, these were *Epitaphia*, *Allatheades*, *Horaia*, *Apophrades*, *Miarai Hemera* and *Eniausia*. However, the most important festival for the dead (the ancient Greek "All Souls Day") was celebrated on the third day of the *Anthesteria* festival and called the *Chutroi*. In the city of Cuma, the feasts on the "All Souls Day" were sumptuous and open to everyone – even slaves.<sup>104</sup> This was the day when celebrants sacrificed for their dead the offering commonly called *panspermia*, although the Greeks also called it *pankarpia*. It was a mixture of all kinds of fruit. It is interesting to note that this kind of offering can be followed diachronically, across a very long time span – from prehistoric down to modern times. A big dish – *kernos* – was filled with many small cups in which various kinds of fruits and liquids (wine and oil) were put, while in the middle of it was a lamp. The women also carried this kind of offering in the Eleusinian Mysteries. Similar to this one also was the basket in the Dionysian Mysteries filled with fruits, among which a phallus was fixed. A dish of the same type was also found in Minoan Crete. This leads to the conclusion that offerings of this kind were made even in the prehistoric age. The same type of *panspermia* also exists on the Modern Greek All Souls' Day called *Psuchobbaton*, the festival that is celebrated within the Orthodox Church in the churchyards before Lent or before Whit Sunday. Usually these offerings today are called *kolluba*, which particularly signifies cooked wheat and fruit.<sup>105</sup>

The next question that arises concerns the aim of the funeral feast – is the feast intended "for the dead" or is it "in the honour of the dead"? Walter Burkert develops his argumentation in order to

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<sup>104</sup> Pantel - Schmitt 2005 II, 33.

<sup>105</sup> Nilsson 1940, 31.

prove the second position. This derives from his theory about *homo necans* and inborn human aggression that, as Burkert states, had originally been directed from human to human, but was redirected towards animals in the act of hunting, in which the relationship between death and eating had been established for the first time. The meal that followed the killing actually represented a manifestation of the victory of life that also functioned as a bond for the community. The same meal is recognised by Burkert at funerals, claiming that several substitutions in the mind of hunting people led to such identification. First of all, the dead body at the funeral was, in the mind of the hunter, substituted with the quarry and then, in the subsequent feast, the dead person was replaced by the sacrificial animal. Animal sacrifice on the grave actually leads to the repetition of the “hunting pattern” and through this pattern, death is transformed into killing – an act of will. Then follows the meal, which appears as confirmation of life and a demonstration of the will to live, by those who survived.<sup>106</sup>

Thus Burkert’s conclusion is that the act of eating at funeral feasts is a way of overcoming death through the confirmation of life. Although his argumentation is persuasive, the question that is raised is if we should accept his position about the funeral feast only being a meal in honour of the dead, and not “for the dead”. First of all, it is not always necessary for food or drink to be poured directly into the tomb in order to be delivered to the dead souls. The custom was widespread of sacral drinking and toasting at memorial meals “for someone’s soul” or for the soul of *agathos daimon* in the hero cult.<sup>107</sup> The presence of the dead souls is witnessed also by driving them (*Kêres*) away at the end of the festivities devoted to the dead.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Burkert 1983, 50-51.

<sup>107</sup> Aristophanes, *Knights*, 85, Čajkanović 1, 253.

<sup>108</sup> **Khre- ajaplakhtoi** as unerring Fates that revenge Laius’ death in Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 472; For the discussion about *Kêres* and *Kares* - either the Attic form of *Kêres*, or Carian slaves, who came to Athens during the festival of Anthesteria and were accepted and entertained for the reason that they were believed to be the souls of dead ancestors. Burkert 1983, 226-230.

Actually, all food and drink that is consumed at those memorial festivities is considered to belong to the dead. This is exactly the reason for exaggeration through the abundance of food and drink, on these occasions.<sup>109</sup> Besides that, more than a century ago, Erwin Rohde argued that the feast was prepared for the dead souls. One of his arguments was that Orestes, after killing Egistes, the man who had killed his father, prepared for him a funeral feast. Why would he do that, if not for a very good reason – to create a good mood and establish some kind of good relations provoking grace in the dead man’s soul.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, at the funeral feast devoted to Patroklos, the blood of the sacrificed animals was poured over his corpse.<sup>111</sup> Why, unless he could taste that blood? This position is confirmed also by archaeological evidence. For instance, the grave-relief from the island of Kos (made about 530 BC) presents death as a continuing wild party with an abundance of food and musical sounds. Dead bodies entertain enthusiastically, refusing to surrender to the dreadful chill of mortality and enjoying life even beyond its natural end, until they are collapsed in exhaustion on the floor.<sup>112</sup>

When Plutarch describes the annual celebration for the soldiers who died in Plataea, he explicitly mentions that the chief magistrate who leads the whole celebration for the dead drinks a toast for the dead, but also invites the dead to join them in the feast. This feast was followed by abundant sacrifices:

kurwqentwn de; toutwn oil Plataiei~ upedexanto  
toi~ pesousi kai; keimenoi~ aujtoqi twn Ellhnwn  
ejagizein kaq j ekaston ejiauton. kai; touto  
mecri nun drwsi tonde ton tropon: tou

<sup>109</sup> E.g. The excessive funeral of Patroklos. Also, there are many proverbs in Serbia that confirm the importance of the abundance of food and drink at all meals devoted to the dead. One such is “They drink as much as on the grave”, or “He has eaten like an orphan (cripple) on the memorial day”.

<sup>110</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, III, 309. Rohde 1991, 27.

<sup>111</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 34.

<sup>112</sup> Vermeule 1984, 175, Karrusos 1962, 121f.

Maimaktrhiwño- mhno-, of ești para; Boiwtoi-  
Alalcomenio-, th/ ekth/ epi; deka pempousi  
pomphn, h- proheítai men afn j hneral/  
salpigkth- egkeleoumeno- to; polemikon, efontai  
d j afmaxai murrinh- mestai; kai; stefanwmatwn  
kai; mela- tauro- kai; coa- oiñou kai galakto-  
ej afnforeusin ej aiou te kai; murou krwssou-  
neaniskoi komizonte- ej euqeroi: doulw/ gar  
oupeno- ekesti twn peri; thn diakonian ekeinhn  
prosayasqai dia; to; tou- ahdra- apoqanein uper  
ej euqeria-: epi; pasi de; twn Plataiewn ol afcwv,  
w/ ton allon cronon ouite sidhrou qigein ekestin  
ouq j eteran esqhta plhn leukh- ajalabein, tote  
citwna foinikoun ejdedukw- arjamenor te udrian  
apo; tou grammatofulakiou xifhrh- epi; tou-  
tafou- proagei dia; mesh- th- polew-. eita  
labwn ufwr apo; th- krnh- ajto- apolouei te  
ta- sthla- kai; murw/ criei, kai; ton tauron eij-  
thn puran sfxa- kai; kateuxameno- Dii? kai;  
Ermh/ cqoniw/ parakalei tou- ajaqou- ahdra-  
tou- uper th- Ellado- apoqanonta- epi; to;  
deipnon kai; thn aimokourian. epeita krathra  
kerasa- oiñou kai; ceameno- epilegei: propinw  
toi- ahdra- si toi- uper th- ej euqeria- twv  
Ellhnwn apqonousi. tauta men ouh ești kai; nun  
diafulattousin oil Plataei-.

These propositions were ratified, and the Plataeans undertook to make funeral offerings annually for the Hellenes who had fallen in battle and lay buried there. And this they do yet unto this day, after the following manner. On the sixteenth of the month Maimacterion (which is the Boeotian Alalcomenius), they celebrate a procession. This is led forth at break of day by a trumpeter sounding the signal for battle; wagons follow filled with myrtle-wreaths, then comes a black bull,

then free-born youths carrying libations of wine and milk in jars, and pitchers of oil and myrrh (no slave may put hand to any part of that ministrations, because the men thus honored died for freedom); and following all, the chief magistrate of Plataea, who may not at other times touch iron or put on any other raiment than white, at this time is robed in a purple tunic, carries on high a water-jar from the city's archive chamber, and proceeds, sword in hand, through the midst of the city to the graves; there he takes water from the sacred spring, washes off with his own hands the gravestones, and anoints them with myrrh; then he slaughters the bull at the funeral pyre, and, with prayers to Zeus and Hermes Terrestrial, summons the brave men who died for Hellas to come to the banquet and its copious draughts of blood; next he mixes a mixer of wine, drinks, and then pours a libation from it, saying these words: "I drink to the men who died for the freedom of the Hellenes." These rites, I say, are observed by the Plataeans down to this very day.<sup>113</sup>

Another meaning of the feast at the funeral and on All Souls day might be grounded in the theory of Olga Freidenberg about early human cognition. Namely, that early thought was characterised by perceiving nature and human society as an undivided totality, whereby, on that premise, people could not establish clear and defined limits between life and death, and the concept of death in early thought was not defined as some definite ending; it was only temporary disappearing before reappearing. Traces of this concept are revealed in the act of tearing apart and eating the raw meat of an animal – the totem. Further, on the agricultural stage, the tearing up of the animal was replaced by the tearing apart and eating of the

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<sup>113</sup> Plutarch, *Aristides*, 21, 2. Greek text and English Translation Bernadotte Perrin, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

bread.<sup>114</sup> The feast that developed during the clan system, states Freidenberg, is a transformation of ritual killing and eating raw meat, while the banquet wine appears as a substitute for the blood. This means that the feast embodies the implemented, totemic concept according to which food is the totem – the god (or the undivided totemic universe) – that dies in order to be reborn through someone else's act of eating.<sup>115</sup> In the same way, the funeral feast, through the act of eating, appears to be a restoration of life. However, in the final period of the clan system, when causal and abstract thinking were developing rapidly, such meaning of the feast became gradually pushed out and forgotten, being replaced with the belief that everything that is done during the funeral ritual, including the feast and food preparation, is aimed at satisfying the needs of the deceased.<sup>116</sup>

Food is not only a biocultural but also a cultural phenomenon, the function of which is to bring people together. Eating always appears as an act of life confirmation, as there is no celebration without an abundance of eating and drinking, and the funeral feast should be understood as the celebrating part of the funeral ritual. In the period of early cognition, tears and laughter, like the concepts of life and death, merged into one and constantly shifted. Only when this cognitional phase ended, laughter started to appear separately: joy and laughter at the funeral started to appear after the mourning phase ended. This interpretation is deduced from the argumentation of Olga Freidenberg, which means that it reveals the deepest (the earliest) stratum of the meaning that eating at the

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<sup>114</sup> Jambl. *Vit. Pyth.* 86. Diog. Laert. VIII, 35; Pythag. C 3 Diels. Freidenberg 1987, 65, cf. 126. Pythagoreans confirm the customs of the Old Slavic people to tear apart the peace of bread. This custom still exists on the festival occasions when the presence of the dead is presumed, e.g. on the Christmas. The agricultural totem of bread might be recognised as well in Serbian ritual of Lapot, when old people when the round bread was put on their head and strongly hit.

<sup>115</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 156.

<sup>116</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 141.

funeral bears. If we want to stay within an adequate theoretical framework that merges with the one of Olga Freidenberg, but also clears up the meaning that can be read from the “outer” perspective, through the observation of the ritual feasting itself, we should recall the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. In the introduction I debated the common points of the two theoreticians and the subtle difference that is the result of their diverse points of view. And while the focus of Freidenberg is above all on the process of early cognition and the mental functioning that produced an early worldview and ritual patterns such as feasting after the funeral, Bakhtin maps and analyses such a worldview in the context of festivals in Medieval culture. This insight that Bakhtin gained from researching medieval culture harmoniously fits and supports Freidenberg’s argumentation about eating as a metaphor of rebirth. Namely, eating is the process that enables boundaries between the body and the world to disappear. The body triumphs over the world, celebrating the victory. This celebration is the reason why eating can never be sad and why feasts are always cheerful and merry. The triumph of the feast is the triumph of life over death, and the victorious body consumes the world and renews itself.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Bakhtin 1978, 299-300.



## IV

# On the Margins of the Funeral: Forgotten and Alternative Ritual Praxis

### 1) Agon

An important part of the funeral ritual were *epitaphio agónoi* (funeral games) that are represented on numerous vases of the geometric period. One of the oldest pieces of evidence is the thirteenth-century *larnax* from Tanagra displaying a sword fight, and a pot from Tiryns showing the chariot racing on one side and a goddess of the underworld on the other.<sup>1</sup> Another important source describing funerary games is the report of Patroklos' funeral in *Iliad*.<sup>2</sup> First of all, the stake is prepared for Patroklos' corpse. In the following verses Achilles sacrifices twelve Trojans, four horses, nine dogs and numerous oxen and sheep. Finally funeral games can begin. But just before the start, Achilles presents prizes for those who will win. Some of these used to belong to Achilles, some to the deceased Patroklos:

**nhwn djekfer jaqla lebhta te tripodav te  
ippou- q jhmionou- te bown t jilfqima karhna,  
hjde; gunaika- ejzw mou- polion te sidhron.**

And from his ships brought forth prizes;  
cauldrons and tripods and horses and mules and  
strong oxen and fair-girdled women and grey iron.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Golden 1998, 92; Decker 1982-3.

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Iliad* XXIII, 257-897. Homer himself refers also to the funeral games for Oedipus in *Iliad*, XXIII, 667-680 and Achilles in *Odyssey*, XXIV, 85-92.

<sup>3</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 258-260. Greek text and English translation based on A.T. Murray. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>. Describing funeral games among the Thracians, Herodotus mentions that very big prizes were common. Herodotus, 5, 8.

Being former possessions of great heroes, these rewards are doubly precious – in both the moral and material aspect.<sup>4</sup> According to Homer, the funeral games for Patroklos consisted of two-horse chariot races, boxing, foot-racing, wrestling, discus- and spear-throwing, and an archery contest.<sup>5</sup>

The agon, as one part of the funeral praxis, appears in ancient Greek culture all the way up to the classical period. However, its decline is noticeable from the seventh century onwards, when it usually appears as part of the cult of heroes of individual sanctuaries. These games related to some local hero are usually associated in mythology with the description of the first occasion of the introduction of celebration and competition, which thereafter continued to be organised periodically (for Python at Delphi, Pelops or Oinomaos in Olympia, Palaimon on the Isthmus, etc. – Pythian, Olympic, Isthmian games). Sometimes agones were simply one-only competitions for the dead, unnamed or unknown in many instances, and these were widespread all around the Greek world.<sup>6</sup> We are informed about one Critolaus, who founded the annual festival at Aegiale for his dead son Aleximachus in the late second century.<sup>7</sup>

The topic of funeral agones unavoidably enters falls within the domain of ancient sport. As I have no intention to dedicate myself to this wide and interesting topic, which should be defined very carefully and without numerous contemporary connotations

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<sup>4</sup> Golden 1998, 88. The Prussian custom was that the winner of the funeral contest inherited his own property. Zečević 1963, 487. Concerning the contest for the property of the deceased on the funeral games see also Homer, *Odyssey*, XXIV, 85-92.

<sup>5</sup> The spear-throwing was announced but it did not take place. Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 884-897.

<sup>6</sup> Golden 1998, 91.

<sup>7</sup> *IG* 12.7 515.

such as that of amusement and leisure, I am going to stay focused exclusively on contests in relation to funerals.<sup>8</sup>

According to Erwin Rohde, there was a belief in ancient Greece that the soul of the dead might have come from the underworld to watch the contest organised in her/his honour. But what is the general standpoint of classical scholars upon the relationship of funeral games and death? The Swiss scholar Karl Meuli has argued that beneath this type of contest lies a kind of trial by combat to determine and punish the man responsible for the death.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, competitions developed in a sequence from armed duels through combat events and other parts of programme of funeral games. Unlike him, Gregory Nagy argues that the connection between death and competition represents ritual compensation aimed at appeasing the anger of the deceased and the release of guilt (or pollution) of those who have survived.<sup>10</sup>

All this leads us to the theory of Walter Burkert and the more in-depth interpretation that his theoretical work permits. Namely, the agon as a funeral game and contest organised on the occasion of someone's death and after completion of the funeral ritual with the feast, undoubtedly appears as a transition from an aspect of death to an aspect of life. Seeing its relationship with sacrificial rituals, either in connection with the funeral, or later when such games became independent rituals, Walter Burkert recognises in the agon a type of sacrificial ritual that represents life-affirmation through the fight. When Burkert says this, he refers to the necessity for men (warriors) to release energy that had accumulated in them during the sacrifice (or funeral ritual as "death transformed into sacrifice"). Moreover, Burkert states that a bad conscience following

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<sup>8</sup> Greek sport is implicated in revealing a variety of differences, expressing and maintaining distinctions between groups of people, social classes, genders, ages and individuals. It was also a domain where hierarchies were set in terms of events and festivals. Golden 1998, x.

<sup>9</sup> Meuli 1968, 30-34.

<sup>10</sup> Nagy 1986, 76.

the death of the sacrificed provokes a will to “suffer” in the subsequent contest.<sup>11</sup>

But before I turn to the meaning of the agon in funerals in the context of Freidenberg’s theory, I want to focus briefly on a hunting phase of society and her interpretation of it. When Freidenberg says that it was during the hunting period that people for the first time used their hands for their deeds in order to confront, fight, and catch the animal, she is referring to the fight with bare hands that was directly linked to the act of eating. Thus, the hunter equalises the metaphor of eating with metaphor of hunting in the meaning of the fight.<sup>12</sup> Both eating and defeating bring salvation from death. The winner is the one who stays alive. It is exactly from defeat that is equated with death that an image of the enemy develops. The concept of the contest being equated with the death is still alive in contemporary times. One very famous symbolical representation of a duel with Death is a chess game in Bergman’s film *The Seventh Seal*.

However, in early cognition, the individual person is not recognisable; the winner and the beaten person are perceived as one and the same.<sup>13</sup> This forgotten pattern of identification of the confronted parts, is easily recognisable in the contest organised at the graveside – agones. In terms of Freidenberg’s theory, the agon might be understood as hunting or eating – as confrontation with death and salvation from it. In its ultimate meaning, an agon on the occasion of death is a contest in which the fight always represents confrontation with death, while the winner always embodies the forces of life.

Let us put this interpretation side by side with Burkert’s argumentation that is based on the suppression and redirection of aggressive energy. According to Burkert, aggression at the moment of death is provoked by pain and helplessness. This, directed into

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<sup>11</sup> Burkert 1983, 54-55.

<sup>12</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 64, 65.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

sacrificial killing provokes remorse. In the light of Burkert's interpretation, on this occasion remorse might reshape aggression into a more noble form, one of competition in a game with a rival who is from the same side. Above all, the agon involves competing with oneself. What else might this mean, but the approval of life and winning over death?<sup>14</sup>

## 2) Dance

There is another ritual praxis that presumably existed in the earlier periods, but disappeared during or after the archaic period – dancing. Namely, numerous vase paintings from the late geometric period with funerary significance, usually in association with the *prothêsis* scenes, display a chain dance of men – sometimes holding weapons, and of women, holding sprays. The interpretation that Kurtz and Boardman is that these are representations of a funerary dance.<sup>15</sup> In relation to this stands another, not so explicit scene from the same period, which occurs on a much smaller number of vases, showing two figures sitting beside a block-like structure (table), with shields or vessels, holding in their hands some kind of noise-making, musical instruments (clappers, cymbals, shakers) or pomegranates.<sup>16</sup> Round dance in the context of the Underworld and death appears in Aristophanes' *Frogs* and in Vergilius' *Aeneid*.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore in Euripides, the chorus mentions that proper mourning includes “to join the dance, which Hades honours”:

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<sup>14</sup> Concerning funeral competitions, literary sources evidence the existence of such games on the occasion of funerals also among Slavs. These games were performed during the festivals of *strava* and *trizna* and were followed by unrestrained celebrations and feasts. Zečević 1966, 377.

<sup>15</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 448. Vergilius, *Aeneid*, 6, 664.

ajwn of j a| lo- eřcetai gown gown  
diadoco~, ajcousi prospolwn cere~.  
iřt j w| cunwđoi; ktupoi,  
iřt j w| cunalghdone~,  
coron ton Aida~ sebei,  
dia; parhđo~ ořuca leukon  
aijmatoute crwtav te fonion:  
ta; gar fqitwn  
toi~ orwsi kosmo~.

Behold a rivalry in sorrow!  
woe takes up the tale of woe;  
the hands of servants make an echo.  
Come, you who join the mourners' wail, come,  
O sympathetic band, to join the dance, which Hades  
honors;  
let the white nail be stained red, as it rends your cheeks,  
let your skin be streaked with gore;  
for honors rendered to the dead  
are an ornament to the living.<sup>18</sup>

This literary evidence, and the before mentioned archaeological data from the geometric period, undoubtedly point to the existence of music and dance on the occasion of the funeral. The semantic relationship between dancing and death is also testified in a famous book of dreams by Artemidorus Daldianus in which dreaming of someone dancing in public, means death. The symbolism of a pomegranate also alludes to death – it is the same fruit that Persephone, after being abducted by Hades, tasted in his house and actually it was this act that irrevocably tied her to the underworld.

So, the ritual practice of dancing, which obviously disappeared from the ancient Greek funeral ritual during or after the

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<sup>18</sup> Euripides, *The Suppliants* 71-78. Greek text ed. by Gilbert Murray, English transl. by E. P. Coleridge on <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

archaic period (8<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> ct. BC), reflects early concepts of death and mourning in which joy constituted an inseparable part. As is obvious from the vase images mentioned above, the funeral dance appeared in the circular form, and such a form did not disappear from the Greek death ritual – it stayed preserved in *prothêsis*, when the corpse was exposed (first outside and afterwards at home) and surrounded by lamenting men and women. This is described in the episode from the *Iliad* when Thetis and her sisters, standing in a circle, mourned the dead Achilles.<sup>19</sup> The same scene is displayed on numerous vase images.<sup>20</sup> The circular form of ritual dance can still be found on the occasion of funerals or commemorations' days in the rural areas of Serbia and Montenegro. And although dancing disappeared from the Greek funeral praxis before the classical period, remnants of such customs are, almost up to nowadays, able to be traced elsewhere in the Balkans. But, for the moment, I would like to stop and leave the subject of dancing at the funeral until I return to it once more, at the conclusion of my work, in the chapter about rethinking Balkan continuities.

### 3) Appendix: marriage to death

There is no such thing as a wedding unwept  
over, or a death without laughter.

(From the Greek folk song)<sup>21</sup>

Research into death and marriage has shown that those two rituals have many common elements. Beginning with the bathing, both rituals continue with adorning, dressing, and covering. The covering of the corpse in the funeral ritual is aimed at the whole body, while in the case of marriage it is only a veil over the bride's face. There is a procession in both cases. In the funerals it is called

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<sup>19</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV, 58.

<sup>20</sup> Zschiezschmann 1928, 17-36, B 8-18.

<sup>21</sup> Den uparcei gamo- aklauto- kai; nekro- ajel ato-

*ekphora*, which means carrying the corpse from the bed where it was exposed (*prothêsis*) to the grave; on the weddings it is a voyage of a young couple to the nuptial bed. Exactly the same word that denotes a nuptial bed, *thalamus*, relates marriage to death, as it bears the meaning of the bridal and the funeral chamber.<sup>22</sup> The relation between funerals and weddings may also be detected through the terminology. Namely, the word denoting a funeral is *kêdeia*,<sup>23</sup> while *kêdestês* is “a relative by marriage”.<sup>24</sup> Another link between marriages and funerals are numerous “wedding” vases with a death theme that point to a specific type of funeral that has components of the wedding ritual. Also, there is diachronic material from rural Greece that reveals similarities between wedding songs and laments. The similarity of pattern is reflected especially in the description of departure (from this world, i.e. from the parents’ home or village).<sup>25</sup> In both cases songs (laments) are sung by the closest female kin. There are even examples of lamentations that are sung in the same forms at the funerals and at the weddings:

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<sup>22</sup> For the bridal chamber see *Il.XI*, 227, *Pi.P.2.33*, *S.Tr.913*, *E. Hipp.540*, and for the funeral one see Sophocles, *Antigone*, 804. *Thalamos* as a marriage chamber and woman’s room represents the only place in the house that belonged to women. In her anthropological analysis of women’s death on the materials of Greek tragedies entitled *Tragic Ways of killing a Woman*, Nicole Loraux interprets *thalamos* as the place of women’s freedom, which is also the place where she may kill herself. According to Loraux, woman’s heroic death as a response to the death of her husband was her suicide (although this solution was not morally approved by the traditional, men’s ethics in everyday life). Such suicide happened in her *thalamos* and it represented the equivalent to the men’s heroic deaths in battlefield. In that context, *thalamos* for the women’s death was the same as the battlefield for men’s death – the place where dying was heroic.

<sup>23</sup> Apolonius Rhodius, 2, 836; Dio Chrysostom, 3, 21, 8; Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 160.

<sup>24</sup> Hesychius, s. v. *Khdesth-*.

<sup>25</sup> On laments and wedding songs in Rural Greece see more in Gail Holst Warhaft (1992) 1995 and Margaret Alexiou (1974) 2002. This kind of similarity between wedding songs and laments appear as well among South Slavs, see Ajdačić 1988.

– Kaste, Niko m j akom j apoy j  
ki auřio prwi; na; fugh-.  
– Twra se; kamposhn wřa  
ol cwriosmo;- baru;- qa; gin j  
Qa; cwriř j ap j thn agaph m j  
Qa cwriř j ap j to; Dhmhtrh m j  
Qa cwriř j ap j ta; eggonia m j

“Stay here, Nikos, just for tonight,  
and leave tomorrow morning!”

“In a short time the painful separation  
will take place.

I will be separated from my wife.

I will be separated from Dhimitris.

I will be separated from my grandchildren.”<sup>26</sup>

The quoted example of a lament mourns the death of Nikos. Although he is already dead, it is imagined that Nikos replies to the mourner, anticipating sorrow for leaving his wife, child and grandchildren. Such a lament might appear in the same pattern on the occasion of marriage. It is sung to the bride, while the bride, instead of saying farewell to children, grandchildren and wife, addresses “my mother”, “my father” and “my brothers and sisters”.

Before I even begin considering the phenomenon of marriage at the funeral, it should be recalled that in both rituals the women’s role might be described as crucial. At weddings, the bride as the “outsider” has a central place mediating between and consolidating two families, while her mother-in-law helps her. At funerals, women play the main role in the period of crisis, in the midst of loss, intervening and influencing not only the transition of the deceased, but also helping the survivors to live through this transitional period.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Danforth 1982, 75-76.

<sup>27</sup> Blundel 1989, 46-7; Foley 1994, 8.

The most important ancient source for the relation between funerals and weddings are vases, especially those that were dedicated and found in the graves of young people who died unmarried. The most common “wedding” vases found in graves are red-figured *loutrophoroi* and *lebêtes gamikoi*. However, apart from the motifs from the wedding ritual (procession, torch and gift-bearers, nuptial bath) that point to their function in the wedding ritual, a large number of *loutrophori* that are found in graves, reveal the motifs from the funeral. One such example pictures the exposition (*prothêsis*) of a dead maiden on her bed (*klinê*). The corpse is surrounded by grieving women, while some older woman, probably the mother of the dead maiden, cradles in her hands the head of the dead girl that is crowned with the nuptial coronal.<sup>28</sup> This kind of evidences indicates the existence of a special type of funeral ritual for those who died unmarried.

Apart from the archaeological evidence, there is also a literary trace of “Brides of Hades”.<sup>29</sup> In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, at verse 891, the heroine, aware of her approaching death, compares her grave with a bridal chamber, saying:  $\omega\lambda$  *tumbo-*,  $\omega\lambda$  *numfeion*.<sup>30</sup> According to Rush Rehm, the mythical paradigm of marriage to death is Persephone’s marriage to Hades described in the Homeric

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<sup>28</sup> Rehm 1994, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Another example of the significant overlap between marriages and funerals is located and has been analysed in tragedies, for instance by Rush Rehm. If we accept the standpoint of Olga Freidenberg that literature genres in antiquity do contain different (and older) strata of the concepts of thought, that might have been already forgotten at the time of creation of certain literary texts then the interpretation of the link between marriage and death in dramatic plays has to be researched in the ritual context. Rehm argues that shifts of weddings and funerals in tragedies aim to provide the feeling of instability that would force spectators to face and see what they would rather not. See Freidenberg 1997, 50. Rehm 1996.

<sup>30</sup> “Tomb, bridal-chamber...!”, Greek text and English translation by Sir Richard Jebb. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

Hymn to Demeter.<sup>31</sup> The famous thesis of Vernant is that marriage in the life of Greek women represented initiation into the world of adults in the same way in which war was necessary for the initiation of men.<sup>32</sup> However, the archaeological material points to the conclusion that “funeral marriages” were not exclusively the privilege of women. This is witnessed by the so-called battle *loutrophori* with war iconography.<sup>33</sup> The shape of the vase indicates the status of the dead person (unmarried), while the themes of the vase paintings point to their bravery, depicting warrior initiation. Through the prism of the functional theory of rites of passage by Van Gennep, according to which rituals surrounding death, birth and marriage are understood as part of a coherent system that is comprehensible in terms of transitional stages, the unification of marriage and death rituals might be understood as a kind of compensation for unfulfilled stages and roles.<sup>34</sup>

The abundant folk and ritual material of rural Greece testifies to the continuity of the ritual of “marriage to death”. A lament from the village Potamia elaborates a metaphor of death as marriage. These are the words of the dying man, addressing his friends and asking them to comfort his relatives:

**Mhn phte pw;- skotwqhka, pw;- eimai  
skotwmeno-.**  
**Mon j phte pw;- pantreuthka kai; phra kalh;  
gunaika.**  
**Phrat hn plaka peqeray th; maurh gh- gunaika,  
ki auta; ta; lianopetrada tavj cw guaikaderfia.**

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 1994, 33

<sup>32</sup> Vernant 1990, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Rehm 1994, 31 see also Kurtz 1975, 64-65 and Bazley 1932, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Each of these transitional stages consists of period of separation, liminal status and rite of aggregation that restores normality; Van Gennep 1960. Literature about rite rites de passage is numerous. For funerals as rites of passage in Greece see R. Garland 1985.

Just tell them that I have married and taken a good  
wife.  
I have taken the tombstone as mother-in-law,  
The black earth and I've taken  
The little pebbles as brother and sisters in law.<sup>35</sup>

In a way, this metaphor functions as a denial of the finality of death. When death appears as a marriage, it becomes a transition, not a permanent state.<sup>36</sup> So, in terms of Van Gennep's concept of *rites de passage* marriage to death should be understood as a ritual that mediates the opposition between life and death. Thus, death is not a final ending; it is nothing but the transition from one household to another. If we remember that in a number of contemporary cultures including rural Greece, the death of young person is regarded to be particularly tragic, we should not neglect the element of consolation that this complex ritual embodies, compensating for what was not achieved during the person's life.<sup>37</sup> So, the joyfulness of the wedding that is ascribed to the tragic ritual of death should not

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<sup>35</sup> Danfort 1982, 80-81.

<sup>36</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Helene Foley's reading of similarity between the two rituals is focused on the other side of the coin, illuminating thus more the aspect of the wedding ritual than the funeral wedding. Understanding the Greek way of marriage and the fate of the bride in her new family as a symbolic death, Foley grounds her analysis of the ritual interpretation by considering the myth about Persephone, whose marriage to Hades was, not surprisingly, understood as death by her mother Demeter. But the marriage of the Fertility Goddess to the ruler of the Underworld, first signified the death of all life on Earth. After her mother's recover from the loss of the daughter, new fertility was about to appear. This shed specific light on the particular kind of marriage laments of rural Greece (found also in other Balkan areas) that describe separation and departure from one household to another. The woman's transition from one family to another that followed every marriage meant a symbolical death and final separation from the family in which the woman was born. Thus marriage always represented a kind of death, while death offered a possibility of marriage to those who had not done it in this life. Foley 1994, 81-82.

be understood in any other way, but as an antidote and remedy for such a painful loss.



# V

## Ritual and Power

### 1) Women in mourning and men in praising

Excessive grief is 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<sup>1</sup>

Lamentation is the central part of every funerary rite. The earliest evidence that testifies to its existence goes back to the Mycenaean period. Painted sarcophagi with representations of mourners from the end of the Bronze age were found in Tanagra in Boetia.<sup>2</sup> These mourners appear either in processions, or individually, with their hands raised to their heads, at the bier or

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<sup>1</sup> Ekabh

wl teknon, wl pai paido- mogerou, sulwmeqa shn yuchn ajikw- mhthr kajgw ti; paqtw; tiv s e'gwv dusmore, draaw; tade soi didomen plhgmata kratou- sternwn te kopou-: twnde gar afcomen. Greek text ed., by Gilbert Murray, English translation by E. P. Coleridge. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>2</sup> Mourners painted on clay sarcophagi. About 1250-1150 BC Iakovidis 1966, 49, figs.5,6 cf. Kurtz & Boardman 1971, 27.

around the grave. This schematic pose coincides with images from Geometric vases and archaic clay plaques and vases, as well as the white-ground *lekuthoi* from the classical period. Apart from these, among Mycenaean votive and funerary offerings, we come across variations 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 sorts of artefacts, the same as painted mourners on vases or sarcophagi, actually represent a lasting embodiment of an important part of funeral ritual – the expression of grief for the deceased one.<sup>3</sup>

Lamentation in the age of archaic, classical Greece, as well as in present-day rural Greece, is performed during the wake, and sometimes (when permitted 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, through time, it became most firmly related to the preburial wake, which is tied to the household. The lament quoted above is a fragment from Euripides' tragedy, which, as in many traditional laments, begins with the bewailing of the lamenter's (mother's) own ill fate, describing also the acts of self-mutilation, which are characteristic for this phase of the ritual. Exactly these types of laments, from tragedies, represent precious material for research into classical Greek ritual lamentation. Although they belong to the literary tradition, it is possible to regard them as 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 mimesis and the theatre.<sup>4</sup> 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,

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<sup>3</sup> Kurtz & Boardman 1971, 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> Plato on mimesis, *Laws*, 658-659c, 669b-670b. Despising women's behaviour during lamentation: see *Laws*, 395 d/e.

directly from religious behaviour, which further implies very strong intertwining between ritual forms, genres, and literary content.<sup>5</sup> On these grounds, it is possible to regard laments from the tragedies as models for everyday life laments.<sup>6</sup> Apart from that, tragedies and their plots are, from their earliest examples, related to the topics of death, and they deal with murders, revenge, sacrifice, guilt, retribution and, of course, with lament.<sup>7</sup> 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 that of Athenians.

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

w) fato, ton d afeō- nefel h ekal uye melaina:  
 ajnofoterh̄si de; cersin elwn konin aigal oessan  
 ceuato kak kefal h-, carien d h̄scune proswpon:  
 nektarew/ de; citwni melain ajmfizane tefrh.  
 aujo;- d ej konihisi mega- megalowsti; tanusqei-  
 keito, fil h̄si de; cersi; komhn h̄scune daižwn

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

<sup>5</sup> See Fredienberg 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Loraux also suggests that lament in tragedies follows the model of professional rather than nonprofessional norms, which is the reason why tragedy does not distinguish (as epic does) difference between the professional and the nonprofessional form of lament (*thrēnos* and *goos*). Loraux 1985, x.

<sup>7</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 127.

new. He flung himself down all huge and hugely at full length, and tore his hair with his hands.<sup>8</sup>

Achilles' uncontrollable behaviour is a unique example of men's excessive mourning in the Greek tradition. The hero pours the dust on his own head and painfully lies outstretched in the dust, tearing his hair. Finally, his pain turns into anger, 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 criticising Homer for presenting Achilles in such an unrestrained manner:

tauta kai; ta; toiauta panta paraithsomewa  
Ωmhron te kail tou; a||lou- poihta; mh;  
calepainein a| diagrafwmen, ouj; w| ouj poihtika;  
kai; h|ea toi~ polloi~ akouein, a|| j osw/  
poihtikotera, tosoutw/ h|ton akousteon paisi;  
kai; a|drasin ou~ dei e|euqerou~ eihai. douleian  
qanatou mallon pefobhemenou~

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.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear from this fragment that the very emotional reaction and expression of grief on the occasion of someone's death is not desirable. The reason for this should be looked for in the

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<sup>8</sup> Homer, *Iliad* XVIII, 22-27. Both texts: [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu); Greek text based on *Homeri Opera* in five volumes. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 1920. English translation by Samuele Buttler.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Republic* 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 Shorey, P., Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1969. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

construction of male (citizen) identity in Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Namely, showing, experiencing and sharing pain upon the loss of someone dear, might put into question one's bravery and readiness to die for the motherland, the essential component of Athenian (and Greek) civil identity.<sup>10</sup>

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

Brishi> d j aʃ j eʔet j ikel h cruseh/ ʃAfrodith/  
wʃ iʃe Patroklon dedaigmenon oʔkei>cal kw,  
aʃnf j aʃwtw/ cumenh lig j eʔkwue, cersi; d j aʃnusse  
sthqeaʃt j hʃd j aʃal hʃ deirhʃ iʃe; kala; proswpa.  
eiʃe d j aʃa klaiusa gunh; eʃkuia qehʃi:  
Patrokle moi deilh/ pleiston kecarismene qumw/  
zwon men se eʃeipon eʃw; klisihqen ipusa,  
nun deʃe teqnhwʃta kicanomai oʃcame lawʃ  
aʃy aʃiou~: wʃ moi deʃetai kakon eʃ kakou aʃieiv  
aʃdra men wʃ eʃosan me pathr kai; potnia mhʃtr  
eidon pro; ptol io~ dedaigmenon okei>cal kw/  
trei~ te kassignhtous, tou~ moi mia geinato  
mhʃtr,  
khdeiou~, oi{ pante~ oʃleqʃrion hmar eʃpespon.  
ouʃe; men ouʃdev m j eʃaske~, oʃt j aʃdr j eʃmon wku~  
ʃAcilleu~  
eʃkteinen, persen de; pol in qeioio Munhto~,  
klaien, aʃlav m j eʃfaske~ ʃAcillho~ qeioio  
kouridihʃ aʃlocon qhsein, aʃkein t j eʃji; nhusin  
eʃ Fqihʃ, daisein de; gamon meta; Murmidonessi.  
twʃs j aʃnoton klaiw teqnhota meilicon aʃipiv

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

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 Phthia, we should have a wedding feast among the Myrmidonos. You were always kind to me and I shall never cease to grieve for you."<sup>11</sup>

There are many patterns in this lament that may be followed through the Greek tradition all the way up to the 20<sup>th</sup> 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, all devoted to Achilles, before he meets his death: Thetis mourns together with her sisters; she starts the mourning with herself and her ill-omen, and then focuses on her son's qualities and worthiness of praise, comparing him to a tall tree, and finishes by bewailing the misfortune of her son's ill fate:

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<sup>11</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XIX 282-300. Both texts: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu> ; Greek text based on *Homeri Opera* in five volumes. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 1920. English translation by Samuele Buttler.

w[ moi eġw; deil h[ w[ moi dusaristotov keia,  
 h{ t j epei; a} tekon uibn ajnumonavi te krateron te  
 ekocon hrwwn: o) d j ajedramen e}nei> iso-:  
 ton men eġw; qreyasa futon w} gounw/ a] wh-  
 nhusin epioproehka korwnisin || lion ei}w  
 Trwsi; machesomenon: ton d j ou} upodekomai  
 auti-  
 oi}kade nosthv santa domon Phl hv i}n ei}w.  
 ofra dev moi zwei kai; ora/ fab- h}l i}o  
 a}nutai, ou}tev tiv oil dunamai craismhsai ipusa,  
 a] | j eim j ofra i}wmi filon teko-, h} j e}jakousw  
 o{ttiv min i {keto pevntqo~ ajpo; ptolevmoio mevnonta.

“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 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 heaven, 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.”<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to terminology for the laments and mourning in ancient Greece, the most common are *goos*, *thrēnos* and later *kommos*. The etymology for the first two (*goos*, *thrēnos*) is Indo-European and refers in both cases to a shrill cry.<sup>13</sup> And though etymology is very valuable as an indicator of the origin of word, it does not indicate the essential impact of the later usage, and the

<sup>12</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XVIII, 52-64.

<sup>13</sup> Frisk, s.v. *gōv-*, *qrhno-*.

development of words' meaning. Thus, the meaning of those two words has changed over time, sometimes diverging in different directions, sometimes becoming similar again. Concerning their archaic usage and usage by Homer, the meaning of *thrênos* is more ordered and polished, often associated with divine performers and with musical elements usually performed by professional mourners.<sup>14</sup> *Goos*, as a term for a less restrained lament, was a spontaneous weeping of the kinswomen. From the time of Homer onwards, *goos* was becoming more and more individualised, and developed more into a narrative. But then again, when we come to the language of tragedies, these terms are often mixed up and treated as meaning the same. Concerning later scholarly definitions, *thrênos* stands for the ritual lament for the dead, which also contains some elements of praising; it is sung on the occasion of death, but also on various occasions of mourning at the tomb. In the tragedies we come across one more term – *kommos*. In early times it was a specific type of tragic lament, often accompanied by wild gestures and associated with Asiatic ecstasy, and, the same as *ialemos*, was also used in tragedy in the meaning of “lament, dirge”.<sup>15</sup> The Eastern connection suggests 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 professional and predominately choral mourners on the one hand, and the solo and narrative improvisations of kinswomen on the other. From the classical period onwards, the tendency was to treat as synonyms all the different terms for a poetic lament that had originally denoted distinct aspects of the ritual lamentation of women. Though the terminology is mixed up and imprecise as it relates to laments in tragedies, it is important that all these laments distinguished by different terminology, might be treated as *thrênoi* according to its scholarly definition, which means

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<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> Alexiou 2002, 103.

ritual laments and not literary ones, since theatre and the mimesis that is specific to it, represents the re-enactment of real life.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, it is also possible to trace the tradition (though for the most part a literary one) of the men's manner of expression at someone's death. Unlike women's lament, which is based on a ritual act or cry of lamentation, often accompanied by music, another (literary) tradition — of epigrams, *elegos*, *epitaphios logos*, and *epikêdeion* — 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 a much lesser extent, presented in the archaic *thrênos*. I will return to the topic of male traditions in the context of state control of the funeral ritual, which led to the introduction of the new rhetorical genre – funeral oration (*epitaphios logos*).

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

Margaret Alexiou, the author of an excellent book on ritual laments in Greek tradition from the classical, across Byzantine all up to the Neo-Hellenistic period, who based her research on diverse sources (literary, archaeological, historical, and anthropological),

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<sup>16</sup> Loraux 1985, 11.

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

succeeded in offering a generic study of the issue through a diachronic perspective. She points out that lament is characterised by emotional intensity, that it is improvised and has an antiphonic performative structure, focusing on negative aspects of the separation of the dead from the kin group, and that it has a sociological base in the discourse of women. The common characteristic of numerous fragments is the addressing of the deceased. Also, because of the fact that lament represents a form of public speech (since it is held not only at home, but also at the graveside, within the public domain), it also delivers certain (public) messages to the living. Apart from this, communicational, function, it also has a psychological one — it channels the pain, both of the lamenter herself and of the whole collective. This, an almost proverbial idea in antiquity, is expressed by the chorus of Trojan women to Hekabe:

**ωλ̄ ἠδ̄υ; δακρυα τοῑ- κاکω- πεπραγοσι  
qrhwn t j oþurmoi; mouσαq j h) lupa- eþei**

What sweet relief to sufferers it is to weep, to mourn,  
lament,  
and chant the dirge that tells of grief!<sup>18</sup>

So, apart from being connected with the uncontrolled behaviour and self-mutilation (tearing the hair, beating the breasts and grabbing the face) that might be perceived as a danger and a manifestation of madness, lament functions on at least two different levels: psychological and communicational.<sup>19</sup> Concerning the psychological level, its main function is the direct confrontation with pain and loss, that, as when people lose someone very close, provokes enormous sorrow that sometimes might be disastrous. It is

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<sup>18</sup> Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, 608- 609. Greek text by Gilbert Murray, English translation by E. P. Coleridge. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>19</sup> 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, *Alcestis* 86-92, 98-104, *Andromache*, 825-835. *Phoenissae* 1485-1492. Earlier evidence also in *Iliad*, X, 78, 406, XXIV, 711.

the funeral ritual and especially lamentation, which provide the bereaved people with means of 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. But the mere fact that funeral ritual is spatially and temporally divided from everyday reality, represents a kind of support to the bereaved to help them return to normal life after a defined (and limited!) time period, relieved and recovered, after experiencing and going through period of great distress.

Concerning aspects of communication, lamentation 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, gains much power in the public domain, giving the lamenters an opportunity to influence the community.

Although lament is a form that is not fixed and is being spontaneously created upon 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 certain defined rules, or as Gail Holst-Warhaft defines it, it is a “structured emotional response to death”.<sup>20</sup> Besides that, the lament is not expressed only by an individual woman, but by many (usually the closest kin, or professional mourners), and if it happens that one loses control, the others join to help her. That is why there are usually several lamenters, so that some of them can mediate the behaviour of others, if necessary. Apart from that, the participation of several women in lamentation might also have a psychological function – to support the bereaved woman in her enormous pain. In relation to the collective character of the performance of laments also stands the antiphonal structure of lament that is traceable to Homer’s *Iliad*.<sup>21</sup> And, of course, due to its inherently dramatic potential, the

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<sup>20</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 39.

<sup>21</sup> The simple strophic pattern  $Ax Ax Ax^2$  is illustrated in the laments for Hector in the end of *Iliad*. *Iliad*, XXIV, 723-46, 747-60, 761-76. This antiphonal

antiphonal lament in tragedy passed through phases of very rich development. It is not necessary to turn one's attention to all particular forms of antiphony in tragedy (e.g. soloist plus choir in refrain; chorus alone; one or more soloist and chorus; imagined dialogue between the living and the dead).<sup>22</sup> The key point about this issue is that the same antiphonal structure has been characteristic for Greek laments from antiquity until nowadays. This points to the conclusion that there has been continuity of thought, since antithetical thought is very often related to the antiphonal structure.<sup>23</sup> Concerning these and other similarities of ancient and Modern Greek laments, Margaret Alexiou points out that they are not grounded only in the universal character of this form, but above all in the cultural and linguistic continuity of the Greek tradition from antiquity to the present day, which is also reflected in the continuity of poetic conventions and imagery.<sup>24</sup>

In close relationship with the antiphonal structure of lament stands the specific socio-communicational code of women. Namely, recent sociological research into men's and women's communication, points out that men are more adapted to speaking publicly and in monologues, while women communicate more easily with other women, preferring to take turns in conversation with others and developing the topic by reference to the previous speaker.<sup>25</sup> Dialogue of exactly this nature is characteristic for numerous lamentations, which implies that the same women's socio-communicational model with many dialogues and taking turns in

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structure also survived in popular hymns such as the one devoted to Kouretes and the Elian Hymn to Dionysos. Page 1962, 871.

<sup>22</sup> For detailed analysis on the issue see Alexiou 2002, Chapter 7.

<sup>23</sup> Due to the highly inflected nature of Greek language, this is also reflected in numerous alliterations, assonances and homoioteleta, which offers an opportunity for the emphasis of rhythm. *Ibid.* 2002, 150.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 2002, 131-150.

<sup>25</sup> See more on this topic in Minister 1991, 27-41.

conversation has continuously existed 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 out that to indulge in mourning and lamentation is proper only for the defined period of time, and to a stipulated extent. The period of lamentation (as well as its form, in the wider sense of the 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 also had to pay attention to her own needs, thinking for instance of having a good meal. And exactly that – 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 20<sup>th</sup> century, or even later (although 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. Why was it at all necessary to control funeral ritual and the expression of pain in laments related to it, and what kind of restrictions were imposed by these laws?

## **2) Control over funeral rituals**

According to the Athenian legislation of Solon from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, it was not permitted 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, and on the anniversary of the burial. Also it was forbidden to lacerate one’s own skin or to beat the breasts (self-mutilation in imitation of the disintegration of the corpse), or to have in any way a loud or noticeable procession. The law also legislated against too much luxury in the funerals, which had been characteristic in former

periods and is apparent on, for instance, so-called Dipylon (geometric) vases from Athens. The images on these sepulchral vases from the eighth century BC represent the 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.<sup>26</sup> Apart from Plutarchus, who cites the Solon's law, there is another source for it:

apoqanonta protiçesqai efdon, oþw- ah  
boulhtai. ekferein de; ton apoqanonta th/  
uðteraiw/ h/ ah proqwtai, prin hñion eçeecin.  
badizein de; tous ahdra- prosqn, oñan  
ekferwntai, ta; de; gunaika- opisqen. gunaika de;  
mh; ekeinai eijsienai eij- ta; tou apoqanonto- mhd  
akolouqein apoqanonti, oñan eij- ta; shmata  
aggheta, eñto;- eçhkont eñwn gegonuiw, plhn  
oñai eñto;- aheyiadwn eijsiò mhd eij- ta; tou  
apoqanonto- eijsienai, epeidan eçencqh, o heku-  
gunaika mhdeiwian plhn oñai eñto;- aheyiadwn  
eijsin.

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

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<sup>26</sup> Plutarch, *Solon*, 21, 4-7. Those who offended against this law were punished by *gunaikonomoi* – officials specially charged to deal with women's affairs, because women always indulge in unmanly and extravagant effeminate sorrow when they mourn. It is said that this law of Solon had been influenced by Epineides of Crete, who had enacted a similar law in Phaistos. Alexiou 2002, 15. For more on the relation of the limitation of luxury to the regulation of rituals, see Ampolo 1984.

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.<sup>27</sup>

In this passage Demosthenes informs us that the wake was moved from the grave to the house, while the later procession to the grave had to be finished by sunrise. Apart from that, during the procession (*ekphora*), 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 pertained only to women older than sixty, and the closest kin.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning the island of Ceos, there was a law from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, which was probably a revised version of an earlier law, with similar main points to the Athenian law. The procession had to be performed in deep silence and women had to leave the grave (*sêma*) before any men appeared, not to disturb them with their emotions. Unlike in Athens, the allowance of offerings was not so limited, but the vessels had to be removed from the grave afterwards.<sup>29</sup>

Another restrictive law concerning funerals was introduced in Delphi. Dated to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, this law, the same like the one from Ceos, probably represents a later version of an earlier law. This one refers to the limitation of expenses for the offerings, as well as to the procession – *ekphora*, during which the corpse had to be closely veiled. It was forbidden for the procession to stop for

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<sup>27</sup> Demosthenes, *Against Macartatus* 43, 62. Greek text and English translation by A. T. Murray from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>28</sup> This is testified also by texts from Aeschylus's *Choephoroi* 430, 8; Diodorus 11, 38; However, this word often denotes the whole ceremony.

<sup>29</sup> Alexiou 2002, 15 cf. LGS 93 A, 261-2.

lamentation. This law also forbade wailing and dirges at the tombs of those that had passed away a 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 to the 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 *phaian*), i. e. a mixture of black and white, but never one of those colours.<sup>30</sup> 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 black kerchiefs on their heads, are automatically perceived by those around them 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 make it quieter, and as invisible as possible. What is obvious is that the constitution of city-states (poleis) and the introduction of democracy that brought with them limited displays 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 social practice often diverges from the law and that it is impossible to find out to what extent these regulations were actually obeyed in the Athenian democracy.

Some theorists suggest that, due to restrictions of women's role in funerary ritual, women, as a kind of compensation, got a important role in all those life-cycle festivities (Thesmophoria, Anthesteria, Eleusian Mysteries, Adonia) that were celebrated both in a vivacious and in a mourning atmosphere,<sup>31</sup> and some of which were exclusively women's festivals.

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<sup>30</sup> Polybius even uses it in the meaning of "mourning". Polybius, *Histories*, 30. 4. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Loraux 1998, 21, Holst-Warhaft 1995, 100. Holst-Warhaft has noticed that all these festivities (Thesmophoria, Anthesteria, Eleusian Mysteries, Adonia) were

As already mentioned, Greek lament was considered to be harmful for society since antiquity, and according to Gail Holst-Warhaft, the force of lament was understood by society as a kind of possession of the lamenter by dangerous powers of darkness – madness. And it is the very power of madness and the authority of the lamenter over the rituals of death, that turned the whole of society upside down.<sup>32</sup> This relationship between death and madness is also recognisable in the carnivalesque atmosphere of fertility rituals that are characteristic for such behaviour, which is completely opposite to the normal. It is in that transitional period, when one social order is broken and before a new one is constituted, that women who lament take over the control. Although there are some cultures that perceive lamenters as mad, lamenters actually mediate the emotions of the whole collective.

Obviously, the city-state was afraid of the institution of lament, as well as of the impossibility of controlling it — and that is why the above-mentioned laws were introduced. For example, one of the regulations of Solonian law that I have not mentioned yet stipulated a ban on talking ill of the deceased.<sup>33</sup> What does this mean? And does it imply some kind of censorship in the period of crisis provoked by the death? Nicole Loraux claims that it does, and that controlling the ritual was actually aimed at controlling women and their public presence and intervention.<sup>34</sup> This control, and the necessity to impose it, should not be understood as if women were

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rites performed for the gods in mourning, sometimes celebrated in a vivacious, sometimes in a mourning atmosphere, but obviously expressing two sides of one genuine feeling, an outburst provoked by the confrontation of the forces of life and death. Nevertheless, some of the Festivities were supported by the city-state, maybe as a kind of substitution for the restricted female role in funerals (for example Thesmophoria).

<sup>32</sup> About death and madness as a preoccupation of western society, see Foucault 1965.

<sup>33</sup> Plutarch, *Solon* 21, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Loraux 1985, 19; This control is also related to the decisions on property inheritance. Holst-Warhaft 1995, 117.

gathering after funerals and going to the agora to make demands. Women's power was spread through the lamentation on the occasion of the funeral, being grounded in two basic emotions – grief and sorrow. According to Nicole Loraux, during the wailing, and at the moment when the mourning one is confronted by their incurable loss, it happens that eternal sorrow turns into wrath (*mênis*), and is transformed into the wish and the call for revenge.<sup>35</sup> And this call is directly related to the blood feud. So this is the reason why the state introduced laws in order to control ritual and to maintain silence about events that the polis wanted to suppress, causing oblivion. Unlike in the period of the aristocratic clan system (when women were allowed to lament publicly), the state took over control of the relationships and conflicts between people.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is possible to conclude that the restriction of the 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 reducing the importance and influence of the aristocratic clans. We find evidence for just lament, provoking a spirit of revenge in the verses from Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*:

οἴτοϋζεται δ' ἰοῖ ἄνακτων,  
ἀναφαινεταὶ δ' ἰοῖ πατέρων.  
πατέρων τε καὶ τεκόντων  
γοῶν- ἐπιδίκο- ματευεῖ  
τοῖ; πάν ἀνφιλόφρων ταρασσέει.

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.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 44; Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 318-323; *Antigone*, 1249 and 1254.

<sup>36</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 102-103.

<sup>37</sup> Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* 327-331. Greek text and English translation by English Herbert Weir Smyth, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

This interpretation of laws controlling mourning and their impact on vendetta is also supported and clarified through the research into laments in rural Greece (i.e. in some parts of it), where blood feuds existed until the mid- and even late – 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as one done by Nadia Seremetakis, who proved the influence of lament on vendetta (sometimes supporting the conflict to make it continue, sometimes mediating it, but usually calling for revenge).<sup>38</sup> In her study, called “The Last Word”, Nadia Semetakis reports on her research in the Inner Mani region, exploring this area and the 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) as internal margins of global modernity.<sup>39</sup> Exactly this is defined by Seremetakis as the poetics of periphery, whereas the poetics of cultural periphery is the poetics of the fragment, which, in spite of and/or due to its marginality, actually has the ability to deny recognition to any centre.<sup>40</sup> This is how Seremetakis explains the existence of lament and its power in the remote and inaccessible areas of Greece, but *the internal margins* is a syntagm

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<sup>38</sup> The method of including recent research on lament, based on immediate anthropological fieldwork experience, enlightens not only some aspects of Greek lament in the historical perspective, but also helps the researcher’s positioning towards a particular context. The study by Nadia Seremetakis is particularly interesting, since it is based on research during a longer period of time (1981-1991), while the researcher herself was not only an outside scholar, but due to her family relationship with the Inner Mani settlers, she herself shared everyday life with the settlers (during an 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 Mainiants accepted her as one of them, and she successfully succeeded in mediating the multiplicity of roles (kinswoman, representative of her clan, ethnographer) using this as an advantage for the constant change of perspectives. Seremetakis 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Seremetakis 1991, 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

that may be equally adequately applied to the existence of lament in ancient and later periods. That is, dominant structures tried to reduce its importance, visibility and audibility and tried to replace it. However, it survived on the margins, with the ability not only to deny recognition to the centre, but even to challenge it.

Seremetakis notices that in Inner Mani, in isolated villages in the southern part of Peloponnesus, society used to be divided into two kin institutions: *gerondiki*, a 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 *gerondiki* represented the formal juridical institution, the *klama* had indirect political and juridical power achieved through public ritualisation. The conflictual relations between the 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 systems. The *klama* sometimes reinforced the decisions of *gerondiki*, and sometimes contested them. This opposition reflects the pervasive feminine critique of the control of the social order by men and exists even today, due to the fact that *klama* still appears as a social institution.<sup>41</sup> This, in particular, means that words said by women on the funerary occasions were the command for male and emphasises the confrontation between male and female. Gail Holst-Warhaft does not agree with Seremetakis who emphasises and underlines that women were appreciated among men when singing and creating laments, but agrees with her position on female influence on further relations in the conflicts.<sup>42</sup> How open the call for revenge is in those

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<sup>41</sup> As a social institution, *klama* formally outlived *gerondiki*. The latter does not exist anymore, but it has continued in the new institutions of urbanisation and modernisation – the ideologies dominated by men. Thus, the continuity of tension between women's and men's practices has not ended. *Ibid.*, 126-127.

<sup>42</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 47.

lamentations may be clear from one of the examples that Seremetakis quotes:

E, Lazare kai Panahv  
 ki esuv Fwkav kai Qeodwrhv  
 e, ti ton perimenete  
 bre tou Panago to fonitav  
 pou kaqete sth Gerakiav  
 Ela kontav mou Perikli hv  
 a, bre-skul iv  
*na za rwthsou na me pei-*  
*anhtan ki h̄souna maziv*  
 st j Agiou Stefanou t j agriwma:  
 pou ginhke anakwlwma  
 sto contro-Panagoul aka.

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  
 of big Panagoulakas.<sup>43</sup>

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. In particular, the Solon's legislative measures against "everlasting

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

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.<sup>44</sup> Also, related to this restrictive legislation is the establishing of a genre of *epitaphios logos*, funeral oration, which was held by some representatives 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 an Athenian invention and Demosthenes mentions that only Athenians give funeral orations for the citizens that died for their country.<sup>45</sup> According to the so-called ancestral law *patrios nomos* (that was actually named like that and introduced by the Athenian polis for the first time in the fifth century BC, never appearing before in tradition although that might be supposed from its title) corpses of the fallen soldiers were returned to Athens and buried together.<sup>46</sup> Exactly such a claim that it was something that even “our ancestors” used to do had the purpose of providing it with legitimacy and power.

In accordance with the fact that during wartime, the polis used to undertake an obligation to prepare and carry out the funerals of its soldiers, the families, i.e. women became deprived of 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 organised by the city-state. Women’s right to organise and perform the whole funeral ritual and thus to accompany the deceased to the underworld was, in the periods of political crisis, taken away from them. The voices of mothers, wives and sisters were damped en masse, not to be heard. The main difference between *epitaphios*

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<sup>44</sup> Plutarch, *Solon*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> Demosthenes, *Against Leptines*, 141.

<sup>46</sup> The corpses, or all bones of the dead that were found, used to be collected by the tribe in common coffins and interred together. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 34.

*logos* and *threnos* is that the latter is characterised by emotional intensity, focusing on the negative aspects of the separation of the dead from the kin group, while *epitaphios logos*, praises death and the dead. One paradigm of the genre of *epitaphioi logoi* is Pericles' speech after the failure of the Sicilian expedition with huge human losses on the Athenian side (at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war).<sup>47</sup>

Since this oration is too long to quote in entirety, I would just like to emphasise some of its main points. First of all, it begins with the praising of the dead ancestors, as those who invented this genre, and from whom a right to speak on the grave originates. However, this statement is not valid, at least for the time in which Pericles delivered this oration, since the appearance of this genre was related to the period of Athenian democracy. Obviously, Pericles mentions this invented tradition in order to acquire credibility. This mechanism of promoting values grounded in the long history of some phenomenon remained one of the most important mechanisms of construction of war ideologies in some parts of the Balkans (I refer here to the recent wars Yugoslavia). On the other hand, the claim that funeral oration has a long tradition (and this actually stands for lamentation) is actually aimed at discrediting and depriving women of their traditional duty and right to mourn. Praising ancestors is mentioned once again in order to emphasise not only continuity between the generations, but also the merits of those who have fought for their "mother country". Apart from that, this panegyric appears to be one that praises Athens as being the polis that is worthier in everything than any other. Those who died actually died happily,<sup>48</sup> and mothers who are still young enough are advised to have more children, not only because newborn children

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<sup>47</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 34-46.

<sup>48</sup> This concept coincides with the Homeric beautiful - heroic death, though Thucydides distances himself from Homer, criticising him for being a craftsman and artist in verse, who actually falsified the truth. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 44.

would bring them forgetfulness, but also for the sake of their country:<sup>49</sup>

karaterein de; crh; kai; a|| lwn paidwn e|| pidi, oi}s  
e||ti h|ikia teknwsin poieisqai: i|dia/ te gar tw  
ouk o|htwn lhqh oil epigignomenoiv tisin e|sontai,  
kai; th/ polei dicoqen, ek te tou mh; e|rhmousqai  
kai; a|sfaleia/ xunoisei: ouj gar oipn te i|son ti h|  
dikaion bouleuesqai oi} ah mh; kai; paida- ek tou  
omoiou parabolomenoi kinduneuwsin.

Yet you who are still of an age to beget children must bear up in the hope of having others in their stead; not only will they help you to forget those whom you have lost, but will be to the state at once a reinforcement and a security; for never can a fair or just policy be expected of the citizen who does not, like his fellows, bring to the decision the interests and apprehensions of a father.<sup>50</sup>

Although Pericles obviously refers to mothers, he omits the word *meter* – mother. This omission is not accidental, since in the Greek tradition mothers are anonymously described as the keepers of memory.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, it is not wrong to claim that the attempt of the polis to deprive women of their right to mourn the dead is related to the transformation of society, in which the polis has flourished on the account of *genos*, which was once in charge of the funeral rituals. This obligation was transmitted to the *oikos*, while the reduced number of female relatives that participated in it indicates that the

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<sup>49</sup> All those motives mentioned may be recognised in any contemporary manipulation praising war ideologies in any of the mass media.

<sup>50</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 44. Greek text based on Thucydides, *Histories* in two volumes. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1942, English translation by J. M. Dent, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>51</sup> Loraux 1998, 16.

women's role was becoming less prominent and less visible. Since the restrictive laws are related to the period of political democratisation and the reduction of the power that aristocratic clans used to have, we may conclude that limiting of women's right to speak publicly, in the domain that traditionally belonged to them, went hand in hand with this process. However, the fact that the laws were insufficient to regulate women's power in the domain of death is confirmed by the organisation of public funerals and introduction of a completely new literary genre. So, the power of the voices of women, whose numbers at the funerals became limited, still in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Athens represented a threat to the polis, its control, and the politics it led.

This point brings us to the concept of amnesty, through which Loraux explains keeping aside and restraining lamentation in ancient Athens.<sup>52</sup> For Loraux, the Greek understanding of amnesty is crucial for the understanding of the mentality of lament. First of all, it requires the oblivion that is, if we accept the Freudian hypothesis, paradoxical in the sense that it represents a presence absent only from itself (active absence). The request for oblivion was made twice by the Athenian polis in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC – first at the beginning and then at the end of it. The first ban on memory was related to the performance of Phrynicus' drama about the capture of Miletus that provoked in the Athenian audience such empathy and sorrow that this event influenced the development of the whole dramatic genre and its orientation to mythical topics related to the distant past (or places). The other ban in 403 BC was related to the blood oligarchy of the Thirty and the decree that every citizen should make an oath not to recall misfortunes: *ou mnhsikakhsw* ("I shall not recall the misfortunes").<sup>53</sup> Those acts Loraux relates directly to mourning and its characteristics, the nucleus around which the lament is

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<sup>52</sup> Loraux 1998, 108.

<sup>53</sup> The aim of this second ban was to make continuity between events and to pretend that nothing really had happened or changed and to erase the conflict in the polis. Loraux 1998, 89.

constructed – *ajaston penqo-* (unforgettable sorrow). As with the word denoting truth *alêtheia*, the word *alastos* is formed as the negation of the word for oblivion – *lêthê*, but *alastos* is related to lamentation and the associated wrath that is unforgettable. So, what Loraux points out is that it is impossible to forget what really happened. Derived from this is the word *alastôr* < the demon of the dead victim, the ghost of non-oblivion that is calling for revenge.<sup>54</sup> Thus, non-oblivion is grounded in the emotion of grief (which is the nucleus of lament), turning into anger and even rage.<sup>55</sup> Non-oblivion, according to Loraux, transgresses space and time, and it was exactly this power that provoked the Athenians to confront it, or rather, to try to control it. Due to its ability to overwhelm everything, the control of memory demanded an oath from every Athenian individually. Of course, giving an oath in front of gods, in a religious context, had to provide stronger credibility. And the same “assistance” and “presence” of gods opened an opportunity for “political authority to establish itself as the censor of memory, alone authorised to decide what is and what must not be the use made of it”.<sup>56</sup> Despite such an enormous and serious attempt, memory could not be erased, and misfortunes banned from the memory did not prevent other misfortunes from happening. And exactly this power of non-oblivion is what gives an irrefutable power to lamentation.

It is not only that funeral ritual was restricted by laws and state regulation because of being harmful. It was despised (as it is despised today) and labelled as negative, precisely because of its

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<sup>54</sup> Plutarch, *Greek Questiones* 25 in *Moralia* 297a. However, Luis Gernet pointed out that, the same as in the case of *mīastwr* and *ajithror*, the word *ajastwr* denotes both the phantom of the victim of violent death who wants to take vengeance, as well as the murderer who is the object of the pursuit. Gernet 1917, 146, 320.

<sup>55</sup> Ancient Greek literature is full of examples of such spillovers. The most famous example is the grief of Achilles that turned into anger, and provoked his heroic exploits.

<sup>56</sup> Loraux 1998, 108.

emotional and immoderate character, as something not decent for a civilised state and for citizens. The ignoble expression of pain belongs only to women or barbarians.<sup>57</sup> Apart from that, the mourner in the masculine is synonymous with being “effeminate”. However, the crucial threat of lament was that it challenged the concept of the beautiful death. From the following fragment of Plato’s *Republic* it is obvious that a good man does not regard death as a terrible thing.

**famen de; dh; oti ol epieikh;- ajhr tw/ epieikei,  
ouper kai; etairo- ejstin, to tecnanai ouj deinon  
hghsetai.**

What we affirm is that a good man will not think that for a good man, whose friend he also is, death is a terrible thing.<sup>58</sup>

Contrary to the male discourse about death given in the funeral oration, in which death was praised as beautiful, heroic, glorifying and unwept, in the female discourse, it was unbearable, sad, and real; it was the death that should have been confronted through the display of and confrontation with emotions.

The continuity of the efforts made to restrain women’s voices in public by taking control over the funeral ritual, and depriving women of their right and duty in funeral rituals (that traditionally belonged to the women’s domain) not only happened in the Athenian polis, but also in the Church, during the succeeding, Byzantine, period. One should observe the Christian Epithapios logos in that light (praising, not mourning the dead), and official choir lament songs, which, from Byzantine times on, tried to

<sup>57</sup> Plutarch, *Letter to Apollonius*.

<sup>58</sup> Plato, *Republic*, III, 387d. Greek text based on Platonis Opera, ed. Burnet, J. 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>

compete with popular tradition, taking on itself the role of official mourner, but did not succeed in overpowering it.

Considering this issue in its obviously, political, i.e. social, aspect, it is essential also to include political theoretical thought. In this regard, I would like to turn my attention to Georges Balandier and his problematisation of the entropy and restoration of the social system. Balandier argues that all societies gradually lose their constructive potential, which in time turns into destructive forces. Step by step, this weakens the whole society, endangering it more and more. However, there are mechanisms aimed at preventing self-destruction. Among others, the funerary rite is important in this sense. Although it follows death that provokes a social crisis, in the end the crisis turns into empowerment and restoration.<sup>59</sup> From the beginning of the crisis, it is women who are authorised to perform most parts of the funeral ritual, if not otherwise proscribed by some specific measures. And although role that was crucial in the moment of crisis diminishes as soon as the normal order is restored, the words said during the crisis (i.e. during lamentation) have a strong impact upon the newly established social order.

Balandier compares the death crisis as a cohesive factor that empowers the forces and the function of society, with another form that restores society —war (together with all its antisocial powers).<sup>60</sup> War enables a community to confront its problem(s) as they are all transferred, embodied and personalised in the enemy. Defining such an enemy provides a community with belief in a better future, after the opponent had been destroyed. So, obviously, death rituals and war as crises in the community bear the same function of community reconsolidation. In the first case, death itself is the enemy and the danger, while in the second, danger is embodied in the wartime opponent, although death is actually omnipresent. In this paradoxical situation death turns out to be a less significant problem, being diminished in the confrontation with the enemy as the source of evil.

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<sup>59</sup> Balandier 1997, 152.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

Even more, death is often instrumentalised in war propaganda in order to mobilise communities with war ideology. How is this possible? The answer might be that a crisis could be constituted only in relation to one of those factors – either death or war. While the crisis provoked by an individual death lasts for a defined period of time, and belongs to a (well defined) domain of ritual, being clearly separated from the everyday reality to which everyone has to return when mourning ends, a war destabilises society for a longer period, gradually influencing all spheres of life. Appropriating individual deaths that are dreadful, horrible events for all who lose someone, and for all people who sympathise with them, in war death becomes celebrated as something desirable, beautiful and heroic. It is only because the enemy is accused of causing all the problems of a community, that his death is so valuable that everything is justified. If an enemy is comparable to a scapegoat victim that takes upon himself all the ills and evil of the community, what then is the patriotic soldier? A priest who kills the scapegoat? Although he may feel like that, soldiers on both sides are the same – scapegoats, who die in the illusion that they are saving their communities. In these situations, deaths are often instrumentalised, and families are deprived of their right to arrange a funeral.<sup>61</sup> Mothers, wives, and sisters are removed from the public space, since their penetrating and mournful voices might endanger political order and official decisions they made, reminding the public of the incurable and unbearable pain provoked by the absolute and undeniable death of their dear ones. Death mourned in such a way could not be celebrated any more as beautiful and desired.

Let me return once more to the issue of non-oblivion that characterises lament songs. According to Foucault the origin of

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<sup>61</sup> This ban was valid for all women, even the wife of Gaius Gracchus. Plutarch, *Gaius Gracchus*, 17, 6. Tacitus, *Annals*, 6, 10 However, this was only a case occurring under the exceptional circumstances of the civil war. Otherwise, unlike Greek lament that was restricted by the laws to the household, the mourning of Roman women was incorporated into a public display, but within and under the control of the civic ideology. Loraux 1998, 33.

power lies in the foundation of a belief system that is so strongly established that everything that this system proclaims is commonly among the majority regarded as truth.<sup>62</sup> In a system based on the religious beliefs and procedures around death, it has been the traditional duty of women to take care of funeral rites. Their credibility lies in deep traditional and religious beliefs, while the power of words pronounced in the moment of crisis resonate strongly, and for a long time. Death provokes a crisis, a period of destabilisation, when pain, fear and panic become overwhelming. Lament as a form of lyric poetry spontaneously reveals and confronts a community with sorrow and irretrievable loss, as well as with the truth. On the contrary, funeral orations, delivered at public funerals and by state representatives, is part of the rhetoric, having all the characteristics of this genre. The crucial point is that rhetoric is a technique of persuasion, an inevitable part of Greek education, that must have been, in the mind of Greek people, perceived as a skill of persuasion. Thus, it is possible to assert that the opposition between funeral oration and lamentation is constructed around the approach to the truth. What funeral oration tries to hide, and beautify, lament directly unmasks.

But let me turn again to funerary ritual and the issue of women's importance in this. Could it be that the women as the Other, as the opponent in society, succeeded in keeping their authority over funerary rituals just because the dominant order (i.e. the state or the church) needed the Other in the moment of crisis, to rule and to dominate. It needed the Other, over which (death) and whom (women), the new power in the renewed order had to be established.

There is one more approach to the restriction of women's lament in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, an indirect one, achieved through the prism of the tragedy that appeared at the time. In her study about women's laments in Greek literature from ancient until modern times, Gail Holst-Warhaft focuses on the development of the

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<sup>62</sup> Foucault 1980, 112.

dramatic genres of 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, suggesting that the relationship of tragedy with the themes of death, guilt, revenge, sacrifice and murder reveals its direct relation to lament. Tragedy, claims Holst-Warhaft, offers a horrible foretaste of death-in-life, and as such it leads to the facing up to this with the fear that appears in the moment of confrontation with the forces of life and death. The same fear is a natural response to real death and traditional lament. Might it be, as Holst-Warhaft suggests, that tragedy has appropriated traditional lament and substituted it with the staged one? In this way tragedy demonstrates all the potential of lament for violence and at the same time, it defuses it in the “catharsis” of the mass audience reaction. Thus, claims Holst-Warhaft, tragedy appropriates the language, music and gesture of traditional women’s lament in order to provide the audience (citizens, exclusively male Athenians) with the whole potential of this traditionally women’s form (grief that can turn into revenge).<sup>63</sup> However, this should not be understood from a one-sided perspective, since tragedies do often disclose the same ambivalence and the shift of state prescriptions on one hand, and public acceptance and community praxis on the other. There are even tragedies that address the question of the clash for domination of this important ritual, and *Antigone* is, of course, the paradigmatic example of this.

### 3) *Antigone*

The issue of state domination of funeral ritual is raised in Sophocles’s *Antigone*. The content of the drama is as follows: two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices ruled over the Thebes. However, one day they confronted each other in a bloody duel. This was the anathema of their exiled father, Oedipus, who cursed them since they did not care about him. The brothers killed each other. King Creon, following his political preferences, decided to bury only Eteocles. However, their sister *Antigone* made a decision to challenge Creon’s

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<sup>63</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 127-128.

will and to bury her unburied brother, no matter what the price. She paid for this with her life. The question that arises is whether it is possible to interpret Antigone's determination to confront King Creon and his prohibition of burying her brother's body as a symbol of Athenian women who refuse to obey the Solonian law. G. Holst-Warhaft denies this, emphasizing that Antigone is alone in her efforts.<sup>64</sup> From a certain point of view, Holst-Warhaft's position is right. And really, the choir that in Athenian dramas always represents public opinion does not support Antigone. However this is only partly true, since the chorus does not support Antigone only in the first part of the play, when she, alone in her efforts, confronts Creon. However, afterwards, when the situation inverts, the attitude of the chorus obediently changes. Even Antigone's sister, Ismene, refuses to join her and thus to confront Creon's will. But how should we interpret the conflict between Creon and Antigone, and also her resolute decision to bury her brother, in spite of the king's prohibition?

A clue to this hypothesis is partially hidden in the dialogue between the sisters in episode one, which reflects not only the opposition between the laws of the authorities and the traditional canons which women obey, but also the opposition between women who are, and those who are not, afraid to challenge the laws and powers of the establishment, that give support to the existing (patriarchal) order. Antigone is firm in her intention to bury Polyneices, and there is nobody who can deprive her of her right to bury her brother:

ἅλλ' ἵουδεν αὐτῷ, τῶν ἐμῶν μ' ἵβριεῖν μετὰ.

No, he has no right to keep me from my own.<sup>65</sup>

The argument of Ismene, who does not want to take part in this, is grounded in her fear and inability to confront and stand up

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<sup>64</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 161-165.

<sup>65</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 48. Greek text and English translation by Sir Richard Jebb, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

against state authorities. She is aware of women's vulnerability and the absence of any protection. Ismene states that due to the fact that they are born as women, they should obey orders even more strongly (*ajrcomesq j ek kreissonwn*). This is clearly related to the position of women in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens and the distribution of democratic civil rights distribution, which completely excluded women. From the day they were born, women belonged to their fathers, while after marriage they entered the household of their husbands, being thus included within the Athenian citizenship system, only through motherhood.<sup>66</sup> Since Pericles' time, citizens were only those men both of whose parents were Athenians. Together with this radical exclusion that was actually a consequence of the introduction of democracy, there was an attempt to remove women from the only public space that traditionally belonged to them – the graveyard. And it is exactly this right of women – that was restricted by the laws of Athenian democracy, – that Antigone does not want to renounce. Ismene, however thinks that it is useless to challenge authorities when lacking power and anyone's support:

nun d j aul mona dh; nw; leleimmena skopei  
 ošw/ kakist j ojloumeq j ojloumeq j eij nomou bia/  
 yhfōn turannwn hj krath parekimen.  
 ajl j ejnoein crh; touto men gunaic j oti  
 eifumen, w- pro;- ahdra- ouj macoumena.  
 epeita d j ouhek j ajrcomesq j ek kreissonwn,  
 kai; taut j akouein kalti twnd j ajgiona.  
 egw; men ouh aijtousa tou- upo; cqono;-

<sup>66</sup> We should not forget the context in which this drama was performed, and that is 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens. Unlike men, who in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens had full civil rights, women in a Greek democracy were unprivileged. Their only claim to civil rights was that, after the time of Pericles (contemporary of Sophocles) they became citizens by giving birth to Athenian citizens. A necessary condition to become an Athenian citizen was not only to have an Athenian father, but also to have a mother who originated from an Athenian family. And apart from this, important, role in giving birth, women had a significant place also in death and the rituals around it.

**xuggnoian išcein, wł biazomai tade,  
toi~ eñ tēlei bebwsī peisomai: to; gar  
perissa; prassein ouk epei bouñ oufēna.**

And now we, in turn — we two who have been left all alone — consider how much more miserably we will be destroyed, if in defiance of the law we transgress against an autocrat's decree or his powers. No, we must remember, first, that ours is a woman's nature, and accordingly not suited to battles against men; and next, that we are ruled by the more powerful, so that we must obey in these things and in things even more stinging. I, therefore, will ask those below for pardon, since I am forced to this, and will obey those who have come to authority. It is foolish to do what is fruitless.<sup>67</sup>

Ismene openly admits that she is not ready to confront those who have power:

**egw; men ouk aītima poioumai, to; de;  
bia/ poitwn dran eīfun aīhcano~.**

I do them no dishonor. But to act in violation of the citizens' will  
--of that I am by nature incapable.<sup>68</sup>

In this fragment it is possible to trace a dual position of women in the patriarchal ancient Greek society, defined exactly in and around the domain of women's authority over funerary rites. On the one hand, Antigone embodies the attitude of women who, aware of their right and the duty of taking care of the dead, carried this out in spite of the obstacles and the state regulations. On the other hand, Ismene represents all those women who were not strong enough to stand up against oppression, withdrawing in the face of it. However, the obvious persistence of the women's role in this ritual is witnessed

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<sup>67</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 58-67.

<sup>68</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 78-79.

in the wider, historical perspective, by the inability of the state (or the Church, from Byzantine and later periods) to repress it completely. This is about the persistent clash between traditional values and later imposed state regulations. However, to put this in a wider historical perspective, the persistence of women's authority over this ritual could have been possible only with the proportional support of the social community, which, in spite of all other official (state) regulations (embodied in this case in the character of Creon), gave (periodically) more credibility to women concerning all praxis related to the secrets of life and death. As I have already argued, the power of lament lies in the sorrow and grief that cannot be forgotten, which turns into wrath (*mênis*) and inverts into the wish and call for revenge.<sup>69</sup> The state regarded this power as dangerous and exactly because of that, tried to repress it. On the other hand, the state regulations did not operate against the essential characteristics of lament, which through sorrow and pain, leads to non-oblivion; only confrontation with the painful truth may lead to reconciliation. No manipulation of death and no state control over the dead, claims Loroux, was successful in the long run. Pain, sorrow and truth always find a way. So do the mourning mothers.

The issue of credibility to participate in the funeral rituals and the already mentioned opposition of Antigone (she is the only one who supports traditional values) on the one hand, and of the choir and Ismene on the other, reveals an obvious (quantitative) imbalance, which, in my opinion, is the main reason why Holst-Warhaft drew her conclusion that Antigone was completely alone in her efforts. The majority embodied in the choir and supported by Ismene's rational answer is opposed by one individual woman with a very strong conviction that she is right (second disproportion). Though the plot from Antigone is not contemporary to 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, dealing as it does with the clash between the order that is given to Antigone by the king (who represents authority), and her deep feeling of duty that was prescribed by the unwritten and eternal

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 44; Homer, *Iliad* XVIII, 318-323; *Antigone* 1249 and 1254.

statutes of the immortal gods, the drama addressed contemporary problems at the time – and the effort of the polis to deprive women of their right to bury the dead.<sup>70</sup> Let me now concentrate on the following fragment in which Antigone answers Creon regarding how and why she dared to oppose his order. This fragment reveals the source from which Antigone draws her strength and decisiveness:

**Antigonh:**

ouj gar tiv moi Zeu;- hh ol khruka- tade,  
ouj j hI xunoiko- tw n katw qewn Dikh  
toiou sd j ejh ajqrwpoisin w fisen nomou-.  
oujle; sqenein tosouton w fhhn ta; sa;  
khrugmaq j w st j agrapta kajfalh' qewn  
nomima duna sqai qnhton ofq j u perdramein  
ouj gar ti nun ge kajqer, aj l j ajiv pote  
zh/ tauta, koupei;- oiden ejx ofou j fanh.  
toutwn egw; ouk efellon ajdro;- oujeno-  
fronhma deisa- j ejh qeoi si thn dikhn  
dwsein qanoumenh gar ejkhth, tiv d pu l  
keij mh; su; proujkhru xas. eij de; tou' crounou  
prosqen qanoumai, kerdo- ajt j egw; legw.  
ofsti- gar ejh plloisin w- egw; kakoi-  
zh/ pw- of j Ouji; kaqanwn kerdo- fereif  
outw- efnoige toude tou morou tucein

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<sup>70</sup> Herodotus informs us (6. 21) about the strong emotional reaction of the audience when watching Phrynichus' drama about the capture of the Ionian city of Miletus by the Persians. Since the event took place only two years before the drama was played, and because of the closeness that Athenians felt towards Ionians, the Athenians empathized so strongly because it reminded them on their own misfortunes. This was the reason for punishing Phrynichus, but as well to define plots of the tragedies distantly from present – either in time, or in space. Of course this kind of limitation that referred to the content of the drama, to its plot in the narrowest sense, in any case left open space for the dramatist to raise important political issues. As an institution of Athenian democracy and everyday life, theatre was actually a place where all those questions that could not be raised in the parliament were debated.

par j oujden a| go~: a| l j a|, e| ton e| e|nh-  
 mhro~ qanont j a|apton h|scomhn nekun,  
 keinoi- a| h| goun: toisde d j ouk a| gunomai  
 soi; d j eij dokw nun mwra drwsa tugcanein,  
 scedon ti mwrw/ mwrian o|liskanw

Yes, since it was not Zeus that published me that edict, and since not of that kind are the laws which Justice who dwells with the gods below established among men. Nor did I think that your decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailling statutes given us by the gods. For their life is not of today or yesterday, but for all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth. Not for fear of any man's pride was I about to owe a penalty to the gods for breaking these. Die I must, that I knew well (how could I not?). That is true even without your edicts. But if I am to die before my time, I count that again. When anyone lives as I do, surrounded by evils, how can he not carry off gain by dying? So for me to meet this doom is a grief of no account. But if I had endured that my mother's son should in death lie an unburied corpse, that would have grieved me. Yet for this, I am not grieved. And if my present actions are foolish in your sight, it may be that it is a fool who accuses me of folly.<sup>71</sup>

Antigone does not obey the authorities; she does not recognise the power of the king, or of the state. Her refusal to follow the order given is grounded in her deep feeling of duty to the family and to the gods (i.e. traditional norms according to which the dead also become a part of the divine underworld). She does not allow any mortal (king or any other representative of authority) to change and override the unwritten law given by immortals, the right to bury and

<sup>71</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 450-470.

mourn the dead. Antigone is aware that with such behaviour she challenges the king's vanity, even when her life is endangered by doing that. Furthermore, she makes a clear distinction grounded in her deep obedience to traditional religion – that the laws dictated by the representatives of this world are only temporary, while those of the Underworld are eternal for her:

**epei; pleiwn cronos  
oh dei m j ajreskein toi- katw twn ejqade.  
ekei gar aipi; keisomai: soi; d j eij dokei,  
ta; twn qewn ehtim j ajtimasa- j epe.**

For the time is greater that I must serve the dead than  
the living,  
since in that world I will rest forever.  
But if you so choose, continue to dishonor  
what the gods in honor have established.<sup>72</sup>

So, Antigone regards the world of the living and its ephemeral rules subject to change, to be worthless compared to the regulations of the eternal and immortal gods. In her response to Creon, it is also possible to recognise her attitude to death as a kind of salvation from an unworthy life. The proper death and burial of Polyneices is more important than her own life, although, such a sacrifice, to bury her kin for any price, Antigone is ready to pay only for her brother. If it was about the death of her husband or children, claims Antigone, she would not insist on burial, since it would be possible to marry someone else or to have more children. But the brother is impossible to replace, especially since her parents were dead:

**ouj gar pot j oult j ah, eij tekwn mhthr efun,  
oult j eij posi- moi katqanwn ehtketo,  
bia/ politwn tond j ah hromhn ponon.  
tino- nomou dh; tauta ta pro- carin legwé**

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<sup>72</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 74-78.

**posi- men aḥ moi katqanoto- a||lo- hh,  
kai; pai- ap j a||lou fwtoḥ, eij touḍ j hḥplakon,  
mhtrō- d j eḥ Aidou kai; patro- kekeuqotoin  
ouk eḥst j aḥel fo- oḥsti- aḥ blaḥtoi potev**

Never, if I had been a mother of children, or if a husband had been rotting after death, would I have taken that burden upon myself in violation of the citizens' will. For the sake of what law, you ask, do I say that? A husband lost, another might have been found, and if bereft of a child, there could be a second from some other man. But when father and mother are hidden in Hades, no brother could ever bloom for me again.<sup>73</sup>

In any case, Antigone considers that her death is not something that is worth regret. “When anyone lives as I do, surrounded by evils, how can he not carry off gain by dying?” says she. This might be understood as another traditional layer, which in general reflects an attitude according to which death is perceived as liberation from worldly troubles.<sup>74</sup> On a grave inscription from Phokis (c. 500 BC), a traveller addresses the dead or probably even Charon himself:

**caire, Caron: ouḍi- tu; kako- legei ouḍe; qanonta  
polo- aḥqropon Iusameno- kamato.**

Hail, Charon. No one speaks ill of you,  
even in death, for you freed many men from pain.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 905-912.

<sup>74</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 463-465. The same attitude to life and death is recognisable in Serbian tradition and proverb “Svakom zlu smrt je lijek” (“Death is the antidote for every evil”). Nikolić 1990, 76.

<sup>75</sup> Peek 1384 “Hail, Charon. No one speaks ill of you, even in death, for you freed many men from pain.”

Antigone also hopes for family reunion in the Underworld, which is understandable in the context of the belief that the dead inhabited this world:

**ej qousa mentoi kart j ej ej pisin trefw  
filh men hkein patriy prosfilh- de; soi y  
mhter, filh de; soi y kasignhton kara.)**

But I cherish strong hopes that I will arrive  
welcome to my father, and pleasant to you, mother,  
and welcome, dear brother, to you.<sup>76</sup>

Apart from these traditional layers that are arguments supporting Antigone's behaviour, there is another thread in the drama, which acclaims and supports Antigone's action and attitude.<sup>77</sup> The fact is that her death in the tragedy represents a turning point and the beginning of Creon's fall. The wise prophet Teiresias foretells misfortune that is going to happen to Creon, due to his arrogant behaviour in forbidding Antigone to bury her brother, and punishing her:

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<sup>76</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 897-899.

<sup>77</sup> The measure of Antigone's success might also be read from the choral ode, in which Antigone is compared to a legendary martyress. First of all, Antigone is compared to Danae. This comparison is grounded in the fact that Danae was imprisoned by an angry king, her father, who was afraid of a prophecy that his grandson would kill him. Although Danae was locked into the tower, the supreme god, Zeus, transformed into golden rain, approached her. She gave birth to a child and the prophecy came true. The other comparison fits better with Creon and concerns king Dryas's son, the Edonian king who was punished for insulting Dionysos' Menads. What is noticeable in this choral is that mourning and divine possession are linked and any interference and effort to suppress them obviously leads to conflict and chaos. The acknowledgement and confirmation of Antigone's act might also be read in the change of attitude of her sister Ismene (as well as of the chorus), who, after Polyneices has been buried. Ismene is ready to make false confession to Creon that she also participated in the burial. Sophocles, *Antigone*, 944 – 955; 955-967.

**Teiresia-**

ajl l eul gev toi katisqi mh; pollou efi  
 trocou- amillhthra- hliou telein,  
 ej oiysi tw n sw n aujto;- ej splagcnwn eha  
 nekun nekrwn ajmoibon ajtidou epei,  
 ajq w h epei- men tw n a h w balw n katw  
 epei- de; tw n katwqen ejqad aul qewn  
 ajnoiron, akteriston, ajosion nekun.  
 w h oujte soi; metestin oujte toi- a h w  
 qeoin, ajl ej sou biazontai tade.  
 toutwn se lwbhthre- usterofqoroi  
 locwsin Aidou kai; qewn Erinues,  
 ej toisin aujtoi- toisde lhfqhna i kakoi-.

Then know, yes, know it well! You will not live through many more courses of the sun's swift chariot, before you will give in return one sprung from your own loins, a corpse in requital for corpses. For you have thrust below one of those of the upper air and irreverently lodged a living soul in the grave, while you detain in this world that which belongs to the infernal gods, a corpse unburied, unmourned, unholy. In the dead you have no part, nor do the gods above, but in this you do them violence. For these crimes the avenging destroyers, the Furies of Hades and of the gods, lie in ambush for you, waiting to seize you in these same sufferings.<sup>78</sup>

Of course, the gods punished Creon for his deeds. Creon's son, Hemon, desperate in his love and sorrow for Antigone, kills himself. Commenting Hemon's death, the messenger mentions the silent reaction of Hemon's mother, hoping that she is not going to organise loud, public lamentation throughout the city, but that she will bemoan her son silently, inside the house:

<sup>78</sup> Sophocles, *Atigone*, 1064-1077.

kaujto- teqambhk j eļ pisin de; boſkomai  
aĉh teknou klouſan eļ- pol in gouu-  
ouk aĵiwſein, aļ l j uþo; stegh- eſw  
dmwai- proqhſein penqo- oiķeion ſtenein.  
gnwmh- gar ouk aþeiro-, wſq j amartanein.

I, too, am startled. Still I am nourished by the hope that at the grave news of her son she thinks it unworthy to make her laments before the city, but in the shelter of her home will set her handmaids to mourn the house's grief. For she is not unhabituated to discretion, that she should err.<sup>79</sup>

This comment reflects the ideal, according to which feminine sorrow should be hermetically closed inside the house. But actually, the silence turns out to be an evil omen, since, the same as loud lamentation and weeping, it may also cause trouble:

eļnoi; d j ouh h{ t j aĵan ſigh; baru;  
dokei proseinai ĉj mathn pol l h; bohv

But to me, in any case, a silence too strict seems to promise trouble just as much as a fruitless abundance of weeping.<sup>80</sup>

The pain of Eurydice was so immense that she killed herself, and her last words were the lament for her son and the curse on Creon. Again, the motifs of death, unforgettable sorrow and lament, overlap. Antigone's action concerning her brother's burial was successful. Not only did she perform all rituals according to the prescribed rules, but her death was vindicated, and in spite of the royal power that gave him the possibility of giving orders, Creon was overpowered – by Antigone, and her decisiveness grounded in the

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<sup>79</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 1246-1250.

<sup>80</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 1251-1252.

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belief that unwritten rules of the underworld obviously could not be overridden by any ephemeral power.<sup>81</sup>

The question that further arises is how should we understand these “unwritten rules of the Underworld” that Antigone follows? The answer should be sought in all that has been argued in previous chapters about death, the dead, funeral ritual and those who practice it, as well as those who try to control it. In the ancient Greek traditional worldview, people believed that the dead continued their existence in the world beyond, and that all rituals were directed to appease them and to assist alliance with their dead ancestors. In that context the proper mourning of the dead seems quite logical – all dead are equal and all deserve a proper farewell and periodical sacrifices. The importance of recognition of the dead and an adequate funeral has already been mentioned in the context of war-killing, when one of the ways to humiliate and insult the enemy is to destroy his corpse and leave it to the vultures. Furthermore, the significance of funeral rites is mirrored in the tradition of organising a proper ceremony even in the case of someone dying far from home and, the corpse being absent. It was thus in ancient Greece, as well as in present-day rural Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and elsewhere. However, with the urbanisation that came with the twentieth century, such ritual practice was lost, although, unfortunately, the need for such a practice did not disappear. The recent wars in former Yugoslavia caused an enormous number of victims with no grave, and no occasion for mourning by their closest kin. The situation becomes even more difficult when the opposed sides in war start to count their dead, with a tendency to relativise those deaths, to make them impersonal, in order to escape from their own responsibility for each individual death. This leads to forgetting and neglecting the dead, and those whose disconsolate sorrow for the senseless loss and unnatural death stays unrecognised and therefore much harder to cure. Precisely this is “Creontean” oppression over those who survive – denying the loss, deprivation and refusal to recognise their

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<sup>81</sup> On revenge in Antigone see, Holst-Warhaft 1995, 165.

pain. Or, in the words of Judith Butler: “Antigone refuses to obey any law that refuses public recognition of her loss, and in this way prefigures the situation that those with publicly ungrievable losses – from AIDS, for instance – know too well. To what sort of living death have they been condemned?”<sup>82</sup> So, public mourning is not only aimed at the recognition of the dead, which was in traditional societies provided through the ritual. Public mourning is about the recognition of the loss and the pain of those who remain alive without their loved ones. This is why the claim in contemporary politics to judge those responsible for war crimes is crucial – the recognition of immense pain and loss is deemed as necessary and compulsory for opening the way to the reconciliation.

This drama does not only confront the issue of competence in funeral rites and their social impact. It also confirms the position of Holst-Warhaft that tragedy and traditional lament are intrinsically related, in the way that tragedy stages the same things that lament brings about, providing confrontation with grief, sorrow, death and revenge.<sup>83</sup>

But let me go back once more to the conflict between Creon and Antigone. Creon’s ban on Antigone’s wish and right given by the gods for the burial actually represents a demonstration of his power. However, this is counterpointed by Antigone’s determination to confront him. So, it is a power game, since funeral ritual and lamentation as female religious duty have been, for centuries, the battlefield for overcoming the forms of power – the power over the dead that gives the power over the alive. And of course, Creon, as a representative of the official public policy, has the power to give orders to Antigone. And if he does not succeed in forbidding her to bury her brother, he has the opportunity to kill her. But in spite of the fact that power lies in the hands of Creon, his win turns out to be short-term.

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<sup>82</sup> Butler 2000, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 127.

Such a reading of Sophocles' *Antigone* sheds a light on the persistence of traditional funeral ritual (which survived from antiquity until the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and women's role in it. Obviously, Antigone and her devotion to tradition, to gods and family laws, might represent an inseparable counterpoint to the laws of the state. As research into Greek funeral rites had revealed, state and family canons used to overlap endlessly without a real winner, all the way up to the development of modern society.



# VI

## Historical and Anthropological Analysis

### 1) Willing and unwilling death

It is also possible to reconstruct relations between the living and the dead by examining the Greek attitude towards death. This relationship, especially in the case of those who died a violent death and their murderers, was interpreted by Louis Gernet, who analysed the ambivalent meanings of the terms *alastôr* and *miastôr*.<sup>1</sup> Those terms refer both to the phantom of the victim of violent death who wants to revenge, as well as to the murderer who is the object of the pursuit.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the vengeful souls of the deceased who have bad intentions, the cult of the dead concerns the souls that might also become well-intentioned and harmless, if certain conditions become fulfilled; in the first place, the dead have to be properly buried and all respect paid and other standard rituals have to be performed in appropriate ways. The necessity of satisfying and appeasing the dead leads us to the context in which the ritual of the killing of the elderly should be understood. This type of sacrificial ritual in which children used to kill their old parents is known in eastern Serbia under the name of *lapot*. Similar customs existed in Sardinia: children used to kill their parents on the edge of the freshly dug grave, while the

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<sup>1</sup> *ajastwr* – A. avenging spirit or deity; II. he who does deeds which merit vengeance, wretch; *miastwr*. A. crime-stained wretch who pollutes others, II. avenger of such guilt. Liddell, H.G., Scott, R., Jones, H.S., *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

<sup>2</sup> Gernet 1917, 146, 320. The concept of the vengeful dead might be associated with the defilement, related to the violent act of killing. Namely, this impurity was understood by Greeks (of the archaic and classical periods) in a very concrete way, like a stain that can be removed by some purifying sacrifice. However, defilement was not related to the murderer, but to the victim of the violence, whose anger makes him yearn for vengeance. Vernant 1996, 125.

elderly laughed at the moment of death.<sup>3</sup> If we consider all the different beliefs connected with the fear of the dead and the perceived threat which the dead pose to the living, then the killing of old people by their children must have been motivated by extremely strong religious reasons. We should not forget that the elderly were highly respected in antiquity by their children.<sup>4</sup> Concerning the laughter that attends the Sardinian ritual, it is religious and it is related to the consent of the victim to participate in the ritual, since laughter in the sacrificial ritual was a necessary condition for its success. In that sense, the ritual killing of the elderly might be related to the belief that the dead in the Underworld actually retain the same shape and strength that they had in the moment of death. This was important, since the power of the dead as divinities who would influence the lives of their descendants depended precisely on their health and strength.

## 2) Magic laughter

In order to analyse ritual laughter in the context of the funeral ritual and the cult of the dead, let us turn to the above-mentioned custom of the ritual killing of the elderly. The existence of human victims is testified all across the ancient world. The custom of killing old people among Romans is testified by the proverb “sexagenarii de pontes” which means “sixty-year-old people (are pushed) from the bridge”.<sup>5</sup> Writing about the Gallic and British provinces, Pliny the Elder informs us that it was an act of piety to kill

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<sup>3</sup> Timaeus, *In Scholia Platonem*, 396 Bekk., Antidog. Dem. in *Shol. Od.*, XX, 302 cf. Čajkanović 1994, 1, 295.

<sup>4</sup> Pausanias, X, 28.

<sup>5</sup> See commentaries that accompany this proverb: Fest., 334M, Cic. *Pro Sext. Rosc.*, 35; For human victims among the Germans see Procop. *B. G.*, 2, 14. About Slavs, see G. Polivka and A. Schreoder, *Realex. s.v. Alte Leute.* cf. Čajkanović. The Serbian ritual of Lapot will be considered further in the text.

a human; it was also considered very healthy to eat him.<sup>6</sup> Strabo mentions a ritual on the island of Ceos, that resembled the one in Sardinia, in which the victims were elderly.<sup>7</sup> In Chartago, human victims were dedicated to the god Chronos and those sacrificed were usually children. As Clytarch informs us, the Phoenicians used to burn children, which caused their limbs to shrink and their mouths to stretch; this grimace resembled a smile.<sup>8</sup> The fact that this laughter was provoked artificially did not diminish its required function in ritual.<sup>9</sup>

In order to analyse this custom and particularly the laughter that is related to it, Veselin Čajkanović introduces Serbian folklore material, namely the example from epic poetry about the violent and sudden death of the young czar, Uroš. The poem goes like this: uncle Vukašin took Uroš to the forest to teach him to hunt, but instead of doing that, he poisoned Uroš and buried him under a fir tree. Uroš' distraught mother started to look for her son, and wandering around, she met a monk who told her about her son's unfortunate death. The crucial moment that Čajkanović emphasises in this poem is that the monk forbade the mother to wail and cry. Instead of doing that, she should have "laughed loudly". The mother of Uroš obeyed:

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<sup>6</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, XXX, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, X, 5, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Clyt. in *Schol. Plat. Rep.*, 1, 14, 396, Bekk. For the existence of good moods among those present during the sacrifice of children, see Plutarch, *On superstition*, c 13. Similarly, when the Mysirian children were thrown to the crocodiles their mothers were laughing. Aelian. *De nat. an.*, 10, 21; Max. *Tyr. Diss.* 8, 5; Frazer 4, 168.

<sup>9</sup> In relation to ritual laughter also stands the Greek idiom **Sardonio-** or **Sardanio- gelw-** that as Diogenes defines it, it is neither spontaneous, nor straight from the heart (*ol' prospoihtor, kai mh; ek cairoush- kardie-*). Several theories about the etymological origin of this phrase existed even in antiquity, deriving it from **Sardo** (Sardiny), **sairw** (part the lips and show the closed teeth, grin) or **Sandwn** (transparent robe). However, the clue to this question stays irrelevant for the meaning of it, which is actually forced laughter, the same as in the ritual.

Nije njega suzom polivala  
Već se groktom na njeg' nasmijala.

She did not shed tears over him,  
but she laughed loudly.<sup>10</sup>

What those verses indicate is that this laughter certainly does not reflect the mood of the mother and, as such, is faked. Nevertheless its function is real. Čajkanović terms it “magic laughter” and suggests that this “camouflage” has religious motives.<sup>11</sup> In order to explain this “non-spontaneous” laughter on the grave, Čajkanović, aware that folklore material such as epic poems might best be clarified through the prism of traditional rituals and customs, turns his attention to the already fore-mentioned human sacrifices in which victims or mothers (as in the poem or in Mysirian ritual) laughed at the moment of death, emphasising that precisely the laughter and the cheerful mood of the victim provided a successful ritual.<sup>12</sup> Adding to this the belief that the dead in the Underworld keep the same form as in the moment of burial, and, linking this with the laughter in the moment of death, shows that such laughter is not only a sign of a good mood, but actually the most powerful manifestation of life, which accompanies the dead on their way to the world beyond.<sup>13</sup> Thus, if the dying person has the ability to laugh at the moment of death, this capability will exist ever after. Adding to this is a picture of the underworld in which no

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<sup>10</sup> Karadžić 1899, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Čajkanović 1994, 1, 293.

<sup>12</sup> Timaeus, *In Scholia Platonem*, 396 Bekk.

<sup>13</sup> Vernant pointed out the relationship between adoring and beatifying the corpse of the deceased as a preparation for the world of the dead, in which the deceased would keep the same form as in the moment of the burial. See Vernant 1992, 71; Čajkanović 1994, 1, 292.

laughter exists,<sup>14</sup> and so it follows that laughter, as an antidote for death, in the very moment of it, provides immortality.<sup>15</sup>

### 3) Lapot

In relation to the Sardonian laughter and the ritual killing of the elderly that Timaius and Strabo mention, Veselin Čajkanović introduces the Serbian ritual whereby people were put to death by their own children, or by the whole village.<sup>16</sup> This ritual is known as *lapot* or *prokletije*. Most of the material collected about this ritual dates from the nineteenth century AD and refers to the area of eastern Serbia (i.e., the regions of Timok and Šopoluk),<sup>17</sup> but there is also some evidence about the existence of this custom in southern Serbia, where it is called *bupe-lupe* (onomatopoeia for beating) and Montenegro (*pustenovanje* and *pustenkovanje*).<sup>18</sup> Several methods are mentioned as way of killing the elderly: this happened usually after the feast, when a round loaf of bread was put on the head of the

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<sup>14</sup> The stone where Demeter took rest and mourned for her dead daughter Persephone is called *agelasto- petra* – the stone without laughter. Aristophanes, *Knights*. 785, Zenobius, *Proverbs*, 1, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Carthaginians believed that if tears and lamentation followed the sacrifice of children, these would deprive children of mortality. Merklin, 83 cf. Čajkanović 1994, 1, 301-303.

<sup>16</sup> Starting from the important methodological standpoint of the French anthropological school of antiquity that it is necessary to compare antique culture with other (Greek or non-Greek) cultures in a wide historical span, to reach a better understanding of the context and the meaning of the research phenomena, this chapter (more than other chapters in the book in which I follow this methodological postulate) reveals how research into ancient cultures might be useful for deeper understanding of some more recent phenomena.

<sup>17</sup> Most of the material from the oral tradition was collected by Vlastimir Stanimirović, Sava Prvanović. During the 1970s, the Serbian director Goran Paskaljević made a film called *The Legend of Lapot*.

<sup>18</sup> Đorđević 1858, 536.

person who was going to die. Then the bread would be struck with a hammer.

Other methods of killing were strangling or beating with a bar. In the case of killing using the round bread, there was a common proverb that followed it “*Ne ubijamo te mi, nego hlebac*”.<sup>19</sup> This proverb reveals the feelings of guilt, i.e. the transference of guilt that, according to Walter Burkert, follows every killing – whether the victim is killed in a hunt or in a sacrificial ritual. Feelings of remorse are overcome within the complex ritual pattern, called by Meuly “the comedy of innocence” (*Unschuldskomödie*), which is performed in such a way that the victim voluntarily approaches death, while the people who execute the victim are not directly revealed or connected with the killing.<sup>20</sup> One of the crucial elements of the “comedy of innocence” is the good mood and associated laughter displayed by the victim which shows his or her consent.

Through the prism of Olga Freidneberg’s theory, the bread can be understood as an agricultural totem. During the ritual feast, the totem is torn apart and eaten, which brings renewal and rebirth. Similarly, in this sacrificial ritual in which divinity was believed to be embodied in bread, killing and destroying is meant to set in motion the forces of recreation. The causality does not yet exist at such an early stage of cognition, and the boundaries are constantly melting. The non-totem that is being killed becomes totem again – that is, it becomes divine. So totems kill and also are killed. The boundaries are blurring, while everything still happens on the concrete level – death and revival are also concrete: images and not abstractions. The death is real, and the rebirth is real. On the metaphorical level it always represents the death of the “fathers”, while rebirth refers to the “children”.

Another perspective from which to interpret bread as an agricultural totem comes from Walter Burkert. A more archaic type

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<sup>19</sup> “It’s not us who are killing you, it’s the bread!”, *Vreme*. no. 1767, 17, 1935.

<sup>20</sup> Meuly 1946, Burkert 2001, 11.

of bread that appears in numerous rituals (sacrificial, wedding rituals, and in the festivals devoted to the dead) are different kind of cereal grains that are simultaneously thrown, for example, on the sacrificial animal or on the wedding couple in the wedding ritual. According to Walter Burkert, this type of ritual behaviour when grain, the earliest agricultural product, is thrown onto the sacrificial animal (on the altar and the earth) is a manifestation of an aggressive gesture, similar to the beginning of a fight. The grains were taken from the basket, in which, underneath those seeds, a knife for the sacrificial killing was placed. This act is a sacrificial ritual which announces the death of the victim and leads to the central moment of the rite, which is the experience of the death of the sacrificial animal. This is followed by the eating of the sacrificial animal, that is the phase of interiorisation of the death. This is the ritual phase which Burkert recognises as one that provokes the transformation of the feeling of horror into a feeling of pleasure in participants. Thus, similarly in the Burkert's theory, the ritual act of throwing the grains that leads to the sacrificial killing, in the final instance also has the function of bringing about the restoration of life.<sup>21</sup>

But let us return to the sacrificial ritual of killing the elderly. Čajkanović rejects the interpretation that such a killing is based on economical reasons, and that the elderly were killed because they were useless, just eating food and producing nothing.<sup>22</sup> Čajkanović thinks that this ritual was grounded in deeper religious reasons. One of his arguments is the existence of the cult of the dead, that offers protection to those who praise them. So, it would be a contradiction if the killing were understood simply as doing harm to future powerful protectors for some banal practical reasons. Another factor that should be taken into consideration is the strong feeling of belonging to the chain of the generations, and the shift between the latter. In that context, there would be a strong identification of killer (children) with the killed (parents), since belonging to the same

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<sup>21</sup> Burkert 1982, 4-6.

<sup>22</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, X, 5, 6.

chain, one day the children would take their parents' place.<sup>23</sup> In his collection of interviews, Svetoslav Prvanović mentions the following anecdote: A man killed his father and dragged him away into the forest with a hook. At the moment when he wanted to throw away the hook, his son told him not to do it, since it would also be needed for his death.<sup>24</sup> So, as in the context of killing old people in Sardinia, who were laughing while dying, a humorous element obviously surrounds the context of *lapot*.

A key to a better understanding of this ritual might also be found in a domain that is indirectly related to this issue (in diachrony, i.e. in ancient Greek culture), and that is the concept of the beautiful death in the interpretation of Jean-Pierre Vernant, a concept that is directly related to, and motivated by, the monstrous and unbearable aspects of death.<sup>25</sup> The choice of dying young and in the peak of youth and strength is motivated by personal wish to avoid gradual decline and ultimate death. Thus death turns out to be an antidote to death. Heroes voluntarily go towards it. This brings us back to the ritual of *lapot*. Would it not be possible that, similarly to the heroic ideal, *lapot* embodies an aspect of voluntarily facing death as a way of overcoming it? First of all, there is no successful ritual without the victim's consent. Moreover, the will to confront death was not chosen by the individual; it was required by the collective. And, thus, the ritual killing of the elderly might have functioned, as in the case of a hero's death, as an antidote for it.<sup>26</sup> With such a death, old people were killed before they completely decayed in

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<sup>23</sup> Čajkanović, 1994, 1, 297.

<sup>24</sup> Prvanović 1964, 19-20.

<sup>25</sup> "There would be no merit in the hero confronting death, choosing it and making it his own. There can be no heroes if there are no monsters to fight and overcome." Vernant 1981, 288.

<sup>26</sup> Of course, the contexts of a hero's death and the ritual of *lapot* are different and the procreative dimensions are constructed differently (in the first case through the fame, and in the second on the level of family continuity).

health, vigour and strength, and, as such, they were more helpful as the protectors of the living people, in the cult of the dead.<sup>27</sup>

There are some contemporary theoreticians who regard this custom as only a scientific myth and all the stories about *lapot* to be nothing more than fiction. Ljubinko Radenković, for example, analyses folklore material from a hundred and seventy Slavic traditional myths, interpreting the motif of killing old people. This motif Radenković relates to another type of ritual – a kind of old-age initiation through which old people became familiar with death. According to this interpretation, marked novelistic motifs that point to such a ritual are beating with some blunt object, hiding old person under the earth in some pit that symbolised the return to the Mother Earth, or wandering through the night being hungry and thirsty in order to be reborn again. Radenković suggests that *lapot* has never existed, arguing that it is only a thought-up motif reflecting the ritual of controlling the death by leading to rebirth.<sup>28</sup>

In order to refute such theory, I would like once more to use the arguments of Walter Burkert about *homo necans*, and his idea about an inborn aggression (redirected in the hunting period from humans to animals) that turns him into *homo religiosus*. “Feelings of fear and guilt <on the occasion of facing the killed animal> are the necessary consequences of overstepping one’s inhibitions.”<sup>29</sup> Burkert further emphasises that although religion mediates this feeling, it does not remove the tension. On the contrary – it heightens it. This means that religion and rituality operate alongside aggression, death and killing, not exclusively indirectly through the ritual killing of the animal, but also through displaying “original” aggression, directed towards humans. Of course the existence of a complex set of beliefs is necessary in order for this to follow, and allow this brutal act to be regarded as religious behaviour. This applies in the case of *lapot*.

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<sup>27</sup> The souls of those who die when very old are weaker and less effective protectors than of those who die strong and young. Heraclites fr. 136 see Diels.

<sup>28</sup> Radenković 2003, 217.

<sup>29</sup> Burkert 1983, 21.

Furthermore, I would like to mention again all the other arguments listed above that speak in favour of the real existence of such a ritual: the nature of *lapot* as a sacrificial ritual and different aspects of it, such as the “comedy of innocence” that would be unnecessary if this ritual were pure fiction; the presence of bread with its “renewal” function; the relation of *lapot* to the context of the cult of the dead and the reputation, importance and power that ancestors have in that cult, and finally the antique parallels of such a custom and the existence of human victims. This all points to the conclusion that *lapot* should not be considered only as a mythical fiction. The problem of ritual and myth is still a matter of great controversy and I am not going to consider further this delicate and complicated issue. Yet, the concept of language is like ritual, a part of tradition, and the essence of this tradition emanates in both forms – mythical and ritual, which both communicate some content.<sup>30</sup> Thus the existence of myths with the motif of *lapot* may only testify in favour of the existence of ritual, and not against it. And as Burkert argues, Greek myths concerning human victims testify about the existence of human sacrifices from the former periods.<sup>31</sup> Discussing the same issue, Martin Nilsson claimed that human sacrifices existed in the cult of Zeus on Mount Lykaion even in historic times.<sup>32</sup>

Let me conclude this chapter about human sacrifice by turning attention once more to the totemic concept of death and early human cognition, before its development to the use of abstractions, according to the interpretation of Olga Freidenberg, which did not perceive death as a definite ending. In the totality of the life-death concept (without the duality that we perceive today), death was just a transitional phase that led to rebirth, like disappearing before

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<sup>30</sup> This does not necessarily mean that myth has to be a part of the ritual or that it provides an objective behavioural description of what happens in ritual, as it is strictly defined by the myth and ritual school. The reality that is described in myth embodies experience offered in the ritual. Burkert 1983, 32.

<sup>31</sup> This, of course, does not mean that rituals are always followed by corresponding myths. Burkert 1983, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Nilsson 1952, 58.

reappearing. Namely, human existence in the early totemic period dictated behavioural patterns. Community, nature, individuals, all functioned uniquely, as a totem. In that context, the killing of others and violence were not motivated by “savagery”, but by a particular conception of life and death.<sup>33</sup> So, the killing of a father, metaphorically identified with old age and death, led directly to the strengthening of the life-powers of children. However, in the early stages of thought, deduction and causality were not yet developed, so, instead of killing the elderly people, sometimes, as in the case of Chartago, we come across “mixed” roles and the ritual sacrifice of children. The same is the explanation of the sacrifice of virgins to the goddess Artemis, who herself sometimes appears as a virgin, and was a protectress of youth (human and animal).<sup>34</sup> Thus, the same goddess who offers vital protection to the growing and young living creatures, asks occasionally for their sacrificial death.<sup>35</sup> The idea that lies behind those brutal rituals was always the same – death which brings rebirth. Thus ritual killing in *lapot*, when related to the context of the existing and important cult of the dead, might have only one function – to empower the forces of life and to act in the generation chain.

#### 4) Pharmakos

The scapegoat ritual as a cross-cultural phenomenon was considered in the fiftyseventh chapter of Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. In this chapter Frazer bases his interpretation of the victim in the first

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<sup>33</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 192.

<sup>34</sup> About human victims of Artemis, see Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 20-21 and Pausanias III, 16, 10-17. (Human victims were replaced by the sprinkling of the altar during the flagellation of the young men).

<sup>35</sup> Artemis actually appears as an aspect of the Neolit Great Goddess. More on this issue can be found in the chapter Appendix and pretext: the concept of life-death-rebirth in the religious context of Old European Neolithic and Greek dis/continuities – the theory of Maria Gimbutas.

place on the “transference of evil”. That is, the possibility of transferring of suffering or guilt usually to a live – human or animal.<sup>36</sup> However, in some societies, guilt might even be translated to objects, and this occurs, according to Frazer, as the consequence of confusion between physical and mental, between material and immaterial.<sup>37</sup> The widespread scapegoat ritual could involve human sacrifice and was either practiced in the hard times of crises and catastrophes (such as war, pestilence, hunger),<sup>38</sup> or periodically, for example once a year. The scapegoat victim in Greece appears under the term *pharmakos*.<sup>39</sup> Frazer mentions the custom in Thrace, in the

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<sup>36</sup> In Jewish ritual described in the biblical book of Leviticus (16. 23, 26-32) collective sins are transferred to two goats. This is the purification ritual in which the first goat – one that was devoted to Jahve, was sacrificed in the normal way, while the one devoted to Azazel was placed alive in front of the temple and the chief priest put both hands on its head in order to transfer the sins of Israel to it. Afterwards, the goat was led away and left in the desert. Azazel, to whom a scapegoat was sacrificed, is opposed in this myth to Jahve, the same as the desert is the antipode of the fertile land. In this, Old Testament, version of scapegoat ritual it is possible to recognise internalisation of religion. Evil is not concrete (war, hunger) but abstract – it is a sin. However, the ritual pattern of purification is external and much older. The perfect solution that Christianity finds for atonement is in the single victim of Jesus, who sanctified and cleansed humanity. (Hebrew 9. 13-14). In Frazer’s interpretation, Jesus compared to a king impersonating a vegetation spirit who performs a scapegoat function. Unlike scapegoat victims that take away evil, these dying gods die in order to save their divine life from the degeneracy that old age brings. At the same time, as Frazer understands it, people use the opportunity to transfer their sufferings and sins to the god that has to die anyway. Frazer, 1913, 9, 227, 306-411.

<sup>37</sup> Among many examples Frazer mentions the ritual of Atkhans on the Aleutian Islands. Instead of giving it to the human or animal, people transferred their guilt to certain weeds that were carried around by the guilty person, after which the weed was thrown into the fire and the guilt was cleansed away. Frazer 1913, 9, 1-3.

<sup>38</sup> For Oedipus as a scapegoat victim see Vernant 1993.

<sup>39</sup> Luis Gernet regarded the institution of ostracism a rationalised form of *pharmakos* ritual. This idea was further developed by J. P. Vernant in the text “Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of Oedipus Rex” see Vernant 1978.

city of Abdera, where the community was purified by the stoning of the scapegoat to death.<sup>40</sup> Among Athenians and Ionians the sacrifice of *pharmakos* was held during the festival of Apollo called Thragelia, which coincided with the ripening of crops. This festival was celebrated for two days – on the sixth and seventh days of Thragelion. The first day that was dedicated to purification (*katharsis*) which was performed through the sacrifice of two *pharmakoi*, was also called *katharma* or *peripisma*.<sup>41</sup>

In the Athenian ritual of *pharmakos* sacrifice, the chosen victims had to satisfy two qualifications – to be ugly and poor. The criterion of ugliness is closely related to the high appreciation of physical beauty in Athens<sup>42</sup>, while poverty, at least according to Parke, provides willingness on behalf of the victims.<sup>43</sup> Although the willing mood is highly important in every sacrifice and certainly in this one, Parke's interpretation is oversimplified. Poverty was just one of the social differences in the Athenian polis, a society that was only nominally democratic, but actually was highly stratified and as with ugliness, it pointed to the lower rank of people being depreciated by the collective. However, the most probable interpretation is that such a choice of *pharmakos* among the ugly and poor had religious reasons.

Considering the scapegoat victim from a cross-cultural perspective, it is obvious that victims for this kind of sacrifice were

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<sup>40</sup> Callimach, *Fragments*, 90; Ovid, *Ibis*, 465. In Chaeroneia, they expelled a slave, which impersonated Hunger – *Boul imo-* Plutarch *q. conv.* 693f.

<sup>41</sup> Burkert 1982, 65.

<sup>42</sup> The ancient Greek perception of beauty differs from contemporary attitude towards it. Body does not represents physically given reality, as we think today, wherefore the definition of antique concept of beauty is difficult to explain. The simplest interpretation would be that the beauty is perceived through outer appearance, but it is more result of the attitude and the message that the body sends (a kind of power and charisma), than of the physical characteristics. Peigney 1998, 211-115.

<sup>43</sup> Parke 1986, 146.

chosen either from among repulsive people with physical defects, or among those who were highly distinguished among others.<sup>44</sup> The reason for this cannot be found in practical, but rather in religious reasons. Obviously, the criteria that provide quality for this kind of victim involve difference. The interpretation of the condition that the victim should be of a low rank, of repulsive appearance, or with some defect, is based on the belief that these are actually positive qualities for this kind of victim. Čajkanović suggests that in the Serbian religion, a defective outer appearance and low rank are actually related to greater inner worth.<sup>45</sup> This hypothesis is supported by the author with numerous proverbs, such as “*Koga Bog kucne, tome ništa drugo ne valja*”.<sup>46</sup>

But let us return to the Athenian ritual. Two *pharmakoi* were needed since one was sacrificed for men, and the other for women. The first wore a string of black figs round his neck and the other a string of white figs. The *pharmakoi* were taken in procession around the city, pelted with rods and beaten with fig branches. Finally, they were expelled from the city. So, even though this sacrifice was performed not through the explicit act of killing the human victims, but through their banishment from the polis, this act, as an exclusion from the community, represented for Greeks a kind of death.<sup>47</sup> Some

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<sup>44</sup> The mythical example for choosing the victim among the most honoured people of the victim is the one of Iphigenia (Aesch. *Agam.*, Eur. *Iphig. A.*, *Iphig. T.*).

<sup>45</sup> Čajkanović 1994, 1, 458.

<sup>46</sup> “The one who is blessed by God does not have anything else.” Karadžić, 1969c, 2241.

<sup>47</sup> It would be helpful for understanding symbolical death and non-existence in the social realm of Greek antiquity, to turn just for the moment to “social death” in the contemporary context, i.e. the phenomenon of exile as a kind of death, which is the experience among many emigrants today, who are forced to move to another country due to difficult political and/or economic situations at home. Although this is the consequence of their own wish and decision, they very often live on the edge of the new society, struggling to satisfy their basic needs for their living, as well as to provide legal documentation for their residence and often without the possibility of going back home (e.g., the example of asylum

Greek authors still remarked that such a ritual was only a milder version of the fierce ritual of killing a victim by burning or stoning. The most detailed description of such a ritual is by Hipponax and refers to sixth century Colophon. Tzetzes informs us that the *pharmakos* in this ritual was burned in the end.<sup>48</sup>

The act of sacrificing *pharmakoi* invariably happened in good atmosphere and with laughter, which in a sacrificial context confirms the approval that is necessary for such a ritual act. This kind of consent indicates a successful outcome for the whole ritual. Besides the laughter during the sacrifice of *pharmakoi*, the ritual was celebrated in a good mood and with music.<sup>49</sup> Čajkanović believes that the laughter which accompanied scapegoat sacrifice is a ritual, and that it is related to the laughing which occurs during ritual of killing the elderly. Thus, as is the case in the ritual of sacrificing old

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seekers). Longing for their homeland and often unable to accommodate into new surroundings, their own life experience is sometimes reflected in their feelings about the phase of living in their own country that is now over, so that in the new surroundings they often try to keep some habits and customs from their former lives, which would normally disappear or change through the dynamics of living, if they had not emigrated. Even those who occasionally travel back home, after a long period of longing, feel lonely and as if they do not belong either to the place they moved from, nor to the place they now live in. For them “the death” may be defined through the feeling of belonging nowhere. Apart from that, their stigmatisation influences their ontological status, which is often suspended. What Hannah Arendt terms a “shadowy realm”, and Orlando Patterson as “Social Death”, Judith Butler defines as “radical exclusion and the one that emerges in the sphere of the excluded, not negated, not dead, perhaps slowly dying, yes, surely dying from lack of recognition as human can be conferred, a recognition without which the human cannot come into being but must remain on the far side of being, as what does not quite qualify as that which is and can be.” Butler 2000, 81.

<sup>48</sup> Hipponax fr. 5-10; Concerning the burning of the victim in Tzetzes. *Chil.* 5, 737. Rohde, Nilsson and Harrison regard it as a fact, while Murry, Gebhardt and Deubner reject it. Cf. Burkert n. III, 2. 8. For stoning, see also Hesych. s. v. *farmakoi*.

<sup>49</sup> For laughing see the fragment of Hipon. – Bergk. Fr.8; about music Hesych. s.v. *kradih- nomo-* and Plutarch, *On music*, p 1133F.

people, laughter as the strongest manifestation of life during sacrifice actually brings some kind of immortality, supporting the recreational forces of life, which is actually the function of this purification victim.<sup>50</sup>

Staying with the theme of *pharmakos*, I would like to enter another theoretical framework, the one proposed by the philosopher Jacques Derrida. His interpretation of *pharmakos* on the grounds of Plato's *Pharmacy* is based on the analysis of Plato's concept of the oral and the written word (that he parallels with the *pharmakon*). It is essential for Derrida's deconstruction that "each of the terms must be simply external to the other, which means that one of these oppositions (the opposition between inside and outside) must already be accredited as the matrix of all possible oppositions".<sup>51</sup> Starting from Plato's position that there is no remedy that is solely and exclusively beneficial, Derrida analyses the word *pharmakon* (and the words grouped around it in the same family) within all the ambiguity of its meanings, referring at the same time to the beneficent and maleficent drugs – *remedy* and *poison*, corresponding to Plato's usage of it that does not always include conscious (or unconscious) use of the word-game. Quoting Protagoras in his classification that *pharmaka* can be both good (*agatha*) and painful (*aniara*), Derrida points that the "beneficial essence or virtue of *pharmakon* does not prevent it from hurting".<sup>52</sup>

Derrida thus understands *pharmakos* as a representative of otherness and of evil, as one who embodies all that is negative, which is a danger for the community and its members. *Pharmakos*, as the symbol and embodiment of all destructive forces and evil, out of the ritual and before he was chosen to be such a victim, is not a criminal. His connection with the evil is established after he had been chosen for such a victim. At the same time, when the

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<sup>50</sup> Čajkanović 1994, 1, 303 See the chapter about Sardonic Laughter and Lapot.

<sup>51</sup> Derrida 1981, 103.

<sup>52</sup> Protagoras, 354a, Derrida 1981, 99.

*pharmakos* is chosen, he is kept by the community to be used for their common salvation.<sup>53</sup> The ceremony of sacrificing the *pharmakos* was held at the boundary of the outside and the inside. According to Derrida, it was essential for this sacrifice that the *pharmakos* was expelled from the city and that death appeared only as a secondary effect of this sacrifice.<sup>54</sup> The *pharmakos* incarnated evil and outside, and yet he was sacred; the victim of *pharmakos* restored, renewed, and recovered the community from the crisis. Thus *pharmakos*, the chosen and the sacred one, provides salvation by taking upon himself all the evil of the society, representing perfect union. *Pharmakos* unifies at himself belonging to the society to the greatest extent – he accepts evil and guilt from all by whom he is attributed; the very next moment he is renounced by the collective and put to death or sent into exile. This provides the society with *catharsis* – the purification that is needed to accept new life (announced by the festival of Thragelion, which marks ripening of the crops).

Before turning to Walter Burkert's definition of *pharmakos*, I would like to use this author's theory about *Homo Necans* in order to shed more light upon the Derridian interpretation that I have given. Namely, the creation of sacredness is, according to Burkert, directly linked to inborn aggression. This aggression that was originally addressed from human to human, was redirected towards the animals at the stage of hunting society. What is interesting is that people had always felt frustration, fear and guilt in the encounter with death, but on the other hand, the confrontation with these feelings, and confrontation with the enemy (whether an animal in hunting or a human in war) appeared to be a condition for life (e.g. providing food is necessary for survival) and according to Burkert, led to the creation of sacredness and to the development of civilisation and religion. These tensions and frustrations never disappeared in the face of such death, but they became controlled

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>54</sup> Derrida 1981, 132.

and regulated through religion. As Burkert says “yet human tradition, in the form of religion, clearly does not aim at removing or settling these tensions. On the contrary, they are purposefully heightened. Peace must reign within the group, for what is called for outside, offends within.”<sup>55</sup> In this last sentence Burkert points out the mutual inter dependence between inner consolidation of the group on one hand and the outside threat, which in a certain way is embodied in the *pharmakos* victim. This ritual is an explicit example of ritualisation and the subduing of aggression. Namely, it enables group salvation and consolidation through marking the *outsider* who originates from the inside. It is clear that this sacrificial ritual operates with the same aggression that exists in hunting. Only here, the aggression is ritualised, culturalised and used (or abused) for the needs of community.

Another perspective upon the interpretation of *pharmakos* that was offered by Walter Burkert refers to the scapegoat motifs in the comparative folklore material of ancient drama, legends and religion, in order to clarify the common pattern of the ritual as follows:<sup>56</sup>

1. The selection of a victim that is either the most repulsive person, or a king, or a woman as both an object of desire and a less valuable being.
2. Communication rites of food offerings and adornment of the victim.

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<sup>55</sup> Burkert 1983, 21.

<sup>56</sup> One of the Greek mythical examples that Burkert mentions is about Athenian king Codrus who voluntarily went to the Dorian troops to be killed. Thus, he helped his army to win because, according to the oracle that the Dorians received, Athenians would win only if their king got killed. Being dressed up as a slave, the king succeeded in deceiving the Dorians. Another example that Burkert cites is Hetite, and concerns the foundation of Ionian Erythria and a plague that struck its people. Understanding that some foreign god had caused it, people sacrificed a ram, drawing him out of the city.

3. Rites of contact and separation in which community actively transfers their guilt and evil to the victim, while the victim is passively led by the active participants.<sup>57</sup>

The least known example that Burkert quotes is from Polyans, a myth about the foundation of Ionian Erythrae in Asia Minor. When embarking upon the colonisation of Asia, king Cnopus received an oracle according to which a priestess from Thessaly should be a general of his army. Priestess Chrysame, a drug specialist, was sent to him. Her mission was to prepare a bull for sacrifice. After adorning a bull with lace and purple cloths with golden decoration, she gave him food in which she had previously mixed up some drugs. The bull became mad after eating the food, which the priestess gave him, and ran away from the altar towards the enemy army. The enemy understood this escape of the victim as a good omen, so seized the bull and ate his meat. This made all of them crazy. It was then an easy task for Cnopus to beat such an army.<sup>58</sup> The same scapegoat motive Burkert also recognises in the episode about the Trojan horse, which the Trojans received as an *agalma* (votive gift) for Athena. Burkert considers that myth, according to which real warriors were hidden in the wooden horse, represents an epic rationalisation of this ritual.<sup>59</sup>

## 5) Conclusion

What is always astonishing concerning this ritual is the behavioural pattern, which is recognisable beyond the ritual, in

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<sup>57</sup> This structuralisation of ritual Burkert presents also in Lévi- Straussian formula, interpreting the scapegoat as a mediator that reverses situation of common danger to common salvation. The formula regards the relation between “community endangered” versus “individual distinguished” versus “community saved” as  $f_x(a): f_x(b) \rightarrow f_x^2(b): f_x^{-1}(a)$ . Burkert 1982, 67 cf. Lévi Strauss 1958, 288.

<sup>58</sup> Polyans, 8, 43.

<sup>59</sup> Burkert 1982, 62.

everyday life, in different social contexts, but most openly among children, who tend to choose one among themselves who differs (at this point we may recall that the qualification for being a scapegoat in ritual is difference, no matter if it were something good or bad). The scapegoat among them is the one who is mocked, offended and excluded from their communal games and their community. Of course, questions of sacrifice and self-sacrifice are complex ones and I certainly do not intend to offer a psychological interpretation of this ritual. My intent here is to understand the original meaning of the ritual, and its functioning in the concrete historical context of classical Athens. The choosing of the scapegoat – and I use the word now as we use it in everyday-life and outside its ritual meaning – is not always motivated by concrete guilt or danger; a scapegoat can be a person chosen by the group to whom the hostility is transferred, and in whom it is expressed.<sup>60</sup> The choosing of the scapegoat serves the function of consolidating the group against the imagined Other in order to exclude her/him and, as I am going to argue in the following paragraphs, to provide illusionary and temporary salvation.

To go back to the scapegoat ritual, the question that arises is the following: if the *pharmakos* is the one of the collective who becomes the Other through his acceptance of others' collective guilt, is not it possible that through this action, the scapegoat actually becomes the collective (he is identified with all their guilt and thus with them), while the collective, which through the ritual tries to reinforce itself, and to renounce its collective guilt in order to become someone else, becomes someone new? So, the *pharmakos* is a representative of the collective who individually renounced themselves, and he is they, who metaphorically die. Through this death, the society is purified and revived. Although the *pharmakos* is chosen from among the poor and those with physical disabilities, this is actually what makes him different from the others and therefore capable of bringing salvation to the collective. Whether we

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<sup>60</sup> In Merriam-Webster's dictionary the second meaning of this word is personified and it refers to (a) one that bears the blame for others and (b) one that is the object of irrational hostility.

use the term salvation or cure, as Derreida who refers to *pharmakon* both as a drug and a medicine, another question is being raised. Is the society really saved and cured through such a victim or is it just temporarily relieved? Are we talking about a medicine or just a “pain-killer”? The guilt of the whole community is only being transferred, being thrown at the sacrificial victim as into a trash-can, waiting to be cured. However, mitigation is just temporary, and a new accumulation of guilt is waiting again the following year to be translated to the Other victim, all over again.

We should not forget that all religious festivals and all rituals are polysemic and the interpretation should not be reduced exclusively to one meaning. The oldest stratum of the meaning of such victimisation should be searched for in the period when life/death concepts became divided and related through the idea of causality – when death actually represented the condition necessary for rebirth and new life. That is how the death of the scapegoat means prosperity and regeneration for the collective. But, if we widen the perspective away from the focus on the ritual of *pharmakos* as human sacrifice that saves the whole community, we find ourselves in fifth-century Athens. It is a developed city-state, which controls (or tries to control) all religious rituals and festivals, constituting and maintaining its political order. What would be the benefit for the polis to organise such a ritual? It lies in avoiding the self-reflection of the collective and not putting into question concrete responsibility. In fact, this festival of the purification of the collective is actually the mechanism of its control. Considering once more Burkert’s definition that the function of ritual is to support the continuity of the community,<sup>61</sup> it is possible to conclude that in the developed political system, the state (ab)uses ritual in order to establish control. But what is achieved through this? Is it continuity or just the status-quo? The ritual of *pharmakos* is an example of how an old ritual pattern is being used in the new context, receiving a new meaning. Though temporarily cured, the community is also being

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<sup>61</sup> Burkert 1983, 25.

controlled and directed. Being unaware of concrete guilt and mistakes, there is no possibility for the community to be authentically cured, which, as we have seen, unavoidably and gradually leads to its destruction.

## **6) Excursus: Zidanje skadra na Bojani – reading women’s body in the scapegoat victim**

In the poem “Zidanje skadra na Bojani” we come across another human victim – this time it is a woman who is walled up in order to provide the successful building of a fortress. This kind of human sacrifice is attested to all over the world, not only in the building of bridges, houses, palaces, temples and fortresses, but also for the foundation of cities. However, the focus of my discussion here is no longer the problem of the scapegoat ritual, which is a complex issue involving the collective transference of guilt to the sacrificial victim, who, assuming all evil, brings salvation to the community. Rather, my intent here is re-reading the woman’s body in the concrete example of the ritual from the poem “Zidanje skadra na Bojani”. Thus, by not focusing on the oldest layers of the poem (which I have already done in the chapter about *pharmakos*) that reveal early worldviews of the life-death concept, I am going to analyse the later strata of this folkloristic material, which arose long after the development of abstract and causal thinking. Namely, the whole corpus of poems to which “Zidanje skadra na Bojani” belongs (so-called Arta Bridge corpus) appears in the Middle Ages and refers to the foundation of the important buildings (cities or bridges) of the period.<sup>62</sup> My analysis in this chapter is particularly focused on the

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<sup>62</sup> This epic poem belongs to the rich Balkan epic corpus of poems known as the “Bridge of Arta”, about the sacrifice of a woman built up in the bridge in order to provide the successful building of the bridge. Apart from Greece and Serbia and Montenegro it appears also in Romania (Maistoru Manoila). All the poems have the some common motive – in order to provide successful building of the bridge or fortress, a woman is sacrificed and build into its foundations.

narratives that appear in this social context, which might also be used today for the reading and interpretation of gender-identity constructs.

So, to return to the content of the poem, which is as follows: For three years there were constant obstacles in building the fortress – everything that was done during the day was ruined by water during the night, until one day came the divine oracle: it was necessary to sacrifice one of the wives of the three brothers Mrnjavčevići who were building the fortress. The agreement was that the victim would be the one who brought them lunch the next day. Of course, the brothers agreed not to tell a word to their wives in order to keep the whole agreement secret. However, only the youngest brother kept the promise, and though it was not her turn, his wife came to the fortress. Realising that she was going to be immured within the stone, she begged to be saved. But the only things that she was able to successfully negotiate were several holes for her body – two for her breasts to feed the baby and two for her eyes to see.

The walled-up female body in this poem is present and absent at the same time. Being walled up, she disappears, emerging only through the openings – those for her breasts from which milk runs out, and those for the eyes to gaze through from the stone. The sacrificial victim of a woman was necessary in order to build “a bridge” that establishes and solidifies social links. The choice of sacrificial victim was not a girl or virgin (as in the case of Iphigenia), but a woman that, through motherhood, already contributed to the community and would continue to do so even after being turned into stone.

The image of the walled-up woman-victim may also be regarded as a metaphor for the voiceless woman, who is quiet as a

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My choice to analyze the Serbian variant of the poem is based on the fact that the motive of the walled up woman’s body in this poem is developed most expressively and in great detail.

stone while feeding her children. Opposed, but at the same time inseparable from her, is a woman – mother, wife, daughter or sister, the active actor in the funeral ritual, who prepares, buries and mourns her closest kin, with the capability of speaking up publicly at the grave. At this point, social and political canons confront family ones in the clash, which in Greek and some other traditional Balkan societies existed for centuries, without a real and definite winner right up to the twentieth century. The limits between private and public are blurred, this time to the disadvantage of women, who, from being the active participants in the ritual become passive sacrificial objects.

What Elizabeth Grosz problematizes in her “corporeal feminist theory” might be applied to the process of the petrifying body of the woman from the poem. Namely, Grosz criticises the position of Western philosophy that conceptualises the “self,” the spirit and the soul, as something without any real bond with the body; the soul is only temporarily chained to the body and the spirit, as understood by Western philosophy, is disembodied. The mind/body dichotomy sets into motion a series of similar dichotomies and a dualistic approach to the world and the mind/body relationship is frequently correlated with the distinctions between reason and passion, sense and sensibility, outside and inside, self and other, depth and surface, reality and appearance etc. In each of these binaries one term is privileged over the other and one term is valued at the other’s expense. The same is true of the male/female dichotomy. Therefore, the subject embodying a female body is doubly devalued. She is always linked to the body, if only by virtue of falling on the devalued side of the binary pair. In this context, man is equated with culture and the mind, while woman is connected to the body and nature. In relation to the man, the woman is the other, reduced to a body.<sup>63</sup>

The same as Western philosophy reduces woman to the body which is worthless, lacking spirit and soul and actually opposed

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<sup>63</sup> Grosz 2005, 22-28.

to them, the woman's body in this ritual episode from the poem is reduced to the connective material for the building: woman who has once been an actor in the ritual becomes a ritual object – body without soul that is petrified almost completely; she is not able to move, to act or to speak – all that is left to her are her breasts to feed a child and eyes to see as a passive witness. On the other hand, man is the actor in the ritual and the one who communicates with the divine, finding out what kind of victim is necessary for a successful sacrifice. The same as for a Western philosopher, a male is the one who is authorised to arrange the roles. The question regarding the metaphor of the petrified woman is at which point the dimensions of myth and reality overlap. Not only do we face the reality of human victims which are testified to in the far past, but we also recognise the clear metaphor of the voiceless woman whose only function has been the maternal one to the extent that maternity is the only aspect of this woman's existence that is recognised. Not allowed to speak or freely use her body, she is not immobile like a stone, but immobile because she is imprisoned **alive**. And albeit in this imprisonment her body does not die, though the only parts of her that are permitted to be publicly present are her breasts to feed and her eyes to see. The same way as the woman's body is imprisoned, walled in, and fixed into the stone, Western philosophy imprisons the woman in her body – speechless, motionless, petrified alive.

And although, as in the poem, there are very strong tendencies to objectify, control and restrain women, their bodies and their voices, I am going to show, in one of the following chapters, that the traditional role of women in funeral rituals was actually the domain through which women gained influence and power. Such a reading of the past and women as ritual actors/objects might be used as a starting point for theorising continuity/discontinuity of the *long durée* racial markers of gender in the Balkans as suggested by Svetlana Slapšak in her article "Identities under Threat of Eastern Borders". According to Slapšak, the construction of gender identity should be regarded according to particular social and cultural contexts, whereby the already established gender studies frameworks

that do not consider these contexts should be subverted.<sup>64</sup> This contrasting and ambiguous picture of the Balkan woman in the ritual may be used as one of the starting positions for research into and the better understanding of the contemporary construction of gender in the Balkans and its specificities that paradoxically unify two extremes – the control and immurement in mute immobility on one hand, and, on the other, the respect for women and women’s power embodied especially in the domain in which women are sovereign rulers – that of life and death. Is it possible that this kind of women’s power and the fear that it provoked, actually motivated the “freezing” of woman’s activity in ritual and her immurement?

It is possible to map both these patterns in the contemporary Balkans. For the moment I am just going to mention the pattern of “walled up” women in the context of the ex-Yugoslav war (during the 1990s) and post-war, transitional societies. This paradigm is able to be analysed using the example of numerous turbo-folk stars. Fulfilling the expectations and the requirements of the TV audience, created according to the demands of propaganda and the revival of traditional values, these half-naked stars always fulfil their maternal duties (the favourite topic of their interviews). Imprisoned in their bodies, they show off for the amusement of the masses, with breasts that are both the objects of desire and maternal symbols. Instead of the stone, this time, their immurement happens in the TV box.

It is possible to recognize another, even more present, but unfortunately less visible, type of women’s immurement in the victims of rape, which was an organised crime during the Yugoslav wars. Discussed usually as members of the nations, these women are often also neglected and abandoned by their own communities. Imprisoned in their bodies that are violated, marked and conquered by the enemy, they are immured alive in “the bridge”, somewhere between the enemy and their own community that “builds a wall” in front of their experiences, needs and problems, without giving enough effort to support them.

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<sup>64</sup> Slapšak 2002, 147.

Let me return once more to the question of the existence of the human sacrificial victim, grounding my argumentation on the theory of Olga Freidenberg, but also that of other more or less world famous anthropologists, classicists, and philosophers (above all Čajkanović, Burkert and Derrida). My intent was to prove that such victims existed in historical time. Basically, I argued that the ritual of sacrificing human had to be related to the two stages of early human cognition – first, when boundaries between life and death were not clear, and when both life and death were perceived as one concept; second, when this idea was replaced by the notion of death as a condition for life, and as a transitional phase before rebirth. Traces of this ritual stayed preserved in folklore material. However, myths and poems that refer to them also embody other, much later, layers of meanings. Namely, it is impossible to differentiate and set clear boundaries between epochs, since the future and the past overlap, letting different ideas or metaphors exist side by side in folklore.<sup>65</sup> My intention in this last chapter was also to demonstrate that research into ancient religious ritual and folklore is not necessarily aimed at deeper understanding of old and forgotten rituals and mythical patterns, but might as well be used for mapping and interpreting narratives that have been preserved right up to nowadays.

## **7) Rereading Homo Necans - aggression as means of cohesion for the community**

In the previous chapters about phases of the funeral rite I have tried to represent the theory about homo necans by Walter Burkert, and to apply it to the funeral and its certain phases. But now, after discussing the issue about the scapegoat, I would like to go back to the basic premises of this theory and to look at another perspective that it offers. Namely, Burkert starts from the premise

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<sup>65</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 238.

that the crucial, inborn instinct through which humans became human was aggression. Inborn aggression that was originally directed from human to human, had been, in the process of hunting, redirected towards the animals. The hunter must have felt guilty when he killed the animal, but through hunting, he obtained food to survive and he could continue his life. Therefore, killing is being celebrated as a form of renewal. This feeling of guilt, remorse and anxiety provoked by sympathy that the hunter felt for his quarry became the root of sacrificial ritual which, as Burkert argues “is the basic experience of the sacred”. Homo religious acts and attains self-awareness as *homo necans*”.<sup>66</sup> According to Burkert, civilised life and order developed out of aggression and the encounter with death. “Man became man through the hunt, through the act of killing.”<sup>67</sup>

However, apart from the encounter with death (through the hunt, sacrificial killing or war), the element that was necessary for successful action was the cooperation of the men, which had been attained precisely through the interrelationship between the members of the community – of the insiders against the outsiders. And exactly this demonstration of aggression towards the outsiders is what constitutes a sense of a close personal community.<sup>68</sup>

The question that emerges is how the community feels and behaves when it does not relate to the outside enemy (animal or warrior) through the process of killing, and if killing is the only manifestation of aggression that constitutes a community.

Let us begin with the victim of scapegoat. It is the enemy from the inside, it is the outsider of the inner community emanating everything all the evil from it, or if I put it more precisely – collecting all evil of the community that attacks it. The victim has to be expelled and put to death in order to provide life for and the continuance of the community, but in the first place it is the outer

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<sup>66</sup> Burkert 1983, 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 20, cf. Lorenz 1970, 251-318.

enemy (chosen from the inside) in relation to which the society may constitute itself. Thus, the constitution of the community does not happen only through the aggression that is demonstrated from the inside of the community towards an outside enemy – animal or warrior, but actually around the enemy chosen from inside. The issue is much more complex, since aggression as a constitutive social element is not always demonstrated through the act of killing, but also through establishing control over those who are defined in the community as the Other – women, foreigners, children etc. Although not defined as the enemy that has to be destroyed, the Other is one who certainly has to be controlled. Thus, if aggression is the instinct that consolidates the group towards the outer enemy, it also lays in the root of the feelings of the dominant group that is entitled to have more rights and freedom, and in the first place, to have control over the Other.

But what is the meaning of the ritual when the city-state adopts it and controls it, as in the case of fifth-century Athens? The state did want to appropriate such a ritual, as a means of manipulation and control. Unintentionally or intentionally (and the latter is more probable, due to the fact that the Athenian democracy was a highly exclusive and non-egalitarian society in which only Athenian men born from Athenian mothers and fathers, at least from the time of Pericles, could have citizenship), the state thus held onto the idea about the Other. The question that I am interested in is whether aggression towards the Other (outsider) practised in ritual, war or everyday reality, is the only way to reinforce a group. I am sure it is not so, although it is obvious that the political system of Athens, as well as of many other political systems, were and still are, built exactly on that premise. It did not help Athens with its problems, which ultimately led to its collapse. And it will never help anyone.



## VII

# Mapping the Anthropology of Laughter in Rituals

### 1) Homeric Hymn to Demeter

The mythical paradigm of female ritual obscenities and abusiveness, as well as the laughter that appears at the end of the period of mourning for the dead, is associated with Hades' abduction of Persephone and the desperate longing for her of her mother Demeter that is described in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. This hymn was composed in the period before the formation of the classical city state and after the period of Homer and Hesiod (8<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century), wherefore it might be taken as a reflection of the cult and ritual dedicated to the forementioned goddesses, particularly in the period when it was created.<sup>1</sup>

Let me, at the beginning, focus on the content of the hymn: Hades, the god of the Underworld, kidnapped Persephone, daughter of the goddess of the Earth and its fertility, taking her as his wife to his kingdom of darkness. Disguised as an old woman, Demeter went looking for Persephone, unable to eat, drink or take any rest. Her despondence was the cause of the death of all nature. According to Helen Foley, desperateness and Demeter's rejection of food are not signs of depression, but part of "usual" mourning behaviour that includes "assimilation of the mourner to the state of the dead".<sup>2</sup> However, as has been argued already in the chapter about lamentation and the phases of the ritual that include mourning of the dead and expressing sorrow and pain for the loss of the beloved, this phase actually represents the process of confrontation with someone's death and thus it is a conscious act, the same as other phases of ritual. So, rejection of food and the fast in the mourning

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<sup>1</sup> Foley 1994, xii.

<sup>2</sup> Foley 1994, 128.

stage of rituals are the consequences of confrontation and acceptance of the pain – when in the state of intensive, ultimate grief for the dead.

But how did the despair and mourning of Demeter end? According to the hymn, Demeter remained desperate until she met a mortal woman, the slave Iambe in Eleusis near Athens. Iambe succeeded in provoking Demeter's laughter by telling her different obscene jokes. This, at the same time, meant that Iambe succeeded in bringing back her will to live (198-205):

dhron d« alfqoggo- tetihmenh hst« ep« difrou,  
oujev tin« oujt« epei>prosptusseto oujte ti efgw/  
ajl l« agel asto- apasto- ejhtuo- hje; pothto-  
hsto poqw/ minuqousa baquzwnoio qugatro«,  
prin g« oje dh; cleuh/- min jambh kedn« eiđuia  
polla; para; skwptou-« ejtreyato potnian abnhn  
meidhsai gelasai te kai; i|aon scein qumon:  
h) dhv oil kai; epeita mequsteron euaden orgai-.

For a long time she sat voiceless with grief on the stool  
/ and responded to no one with word or gesture./  
Unsmiling, tasting neither food nor drink, / she sat  
wasting with desire for her deep-girt daughter, / until  
knowing Iambe jested with her and / mocking with  
many a joke moved the holy goddess / to smile and  
laugh and keep a gracious heart --/ Imabe, who later  
pleased her moods as well.<sup>3</sup>

The words for joking and jesting used by Iambe were *chleu* (joke, jest) and *skôptô* (to mock, to jeer) (202-3), both of which have offensive connotations. However, this offensive dimension shows strong ambivalence – through destruction and offence it brings rebirth and recreation. In the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, the status of which belongs to the conservative epic tradition, this part

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<sup>3</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 198-205, translated by Helen Foley.

alludes to the substratum of female cultic practice. Demeter, surrounded by the mortal women, laughed as a human, not as the Olympian.<sup>4</sup> The hymn continues with the episode concerning Demeter's effort to make Demophoon, the son of Metaneira ("late born, beyond all hope"), immortal.<sup>5</sup> Metaneira did not recognise the disguised goddess, and since she was unaware of Demeter's godly intention, she prevented her from making the divine intervention. Concerning the age of Metaneira, she was the same age as Iambe, an old woman. Old women figure in this episode as symbols of enormous energy, with sexual and reproductive powers belied by their outer appearance.<sup>6</sup>

According to another version of this myth, Baubo, whose name (*baubôn*) means "vulva", made Demeter laugh. She did it not only in words, but also visually, displaying her genitals, and (in some versions) transforming them into a shape resembling a child.<sup>7</sup> There is another character that appears in the scene with Baubo and Demeter – a boy called Iacchus who was actually the first to burst loudly into laughter. Immediately after him, Demeter also started to laugh.

This episode with Iambe or Baubo, who succeeded in consoling and cheering up Demeter, using in one case obscene language, or in the other, obscene gesticulation, may be related to the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin about the carnivalesque and grotesque that

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<sup>4</sup> O'Higgins points out the parallelism between Demeter's laughter and the biblical episode in which Sarah, Abraham's eighty-years-old wife, discovers that she is pregnant and bursts into laughter. O'Higgins 2001, 138.

<sup>5</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 219.

<sup>6</sup> O'Higgins 201, 138.

<sup>7</sup> We find the other versions of the story about Baubo and Demeter in Clement *Protreptikos* 2. 20.1-21.2, Orphic frag. 52 Kern, Arnobius *Adversus nationes* 5.25-26, Eusebios *Praeparatio evangelica* 2. 3. 31-35. There is also a version where Baubo holds in her hands the laughing baby Iacchus, who is defined by Suda as "Dionysos at the breast". The cult of Baubo existed on Naxos in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and on Paros in the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC.

he developed in the book *Rabelais and his world*. In this work Bakhtin in the first place refers to Rabelais and, therefore, to the medieval renaissance culture of carnival and laughter.<sup>8</sup> However his theory, especially when he turns to the ritual carnivalesque festivities, is directly applicable to antiquity. In medieval, but also in the ancient, cultures the liberation and rebirth that happened through degradation, found its communal expression during times of carnival, when people celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing and established order. In such carnival festivals, it was essential that the whole world was turned upside down and that official hierarchies were reversed.<sup>9</sup>

The argument that the carnivalesque worldview existed also in antique times has already been discussed in the introduction. The facts that support this argument are numerous and there are obvious parallels between the Aristophanes' comedies and the work of Rabelais (*Gargantua and Pantagruel*), which was, after all, the inspiration for Bakhtin to formulate the aforementioned theory about the carnivalesque. There are numerous parallels between the style of Aristophanes and that of Rabelais – in their ideological attitudes and in their way of despising vanity of any kind, in their choice of motifs, in their sharp criticism of politics and religion, etc. Both Rabelais and Aristophanes use an important characteristic of early attic comedy – a verbal *agôn* in which two opposed sides confront their attitudes and ideas (moral, political, ideological). Rabelais' work is rich in such discussions – e.g. those that Pantagruel had with representatives of different philosophical schools, or discussions about Panurge's marriage in Book Three that correspond to the discussions between Philocleon and Bdelycleon in Aristophanes' *Wasps* or Euripides and Aeschylus in his *Frogs*. The third, and the most important, parallel is the humorous style of both authors. They

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<sup>8</sup> The Middle Ages *carnivalesque* culture is embodied in three forms: ritual carnival, the literary works of laughter and different forms of curses and street speech. Bakhtin 1979, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Bakhtin 1979, 18.

often choose absurd situations. Another common motif is the grotesque, which characterises description of lawsuits over some senseless and absurd issues with illogical argumentation.<sup>10</sup> Another characteristic is the burlesque style of both writers and the freedom of their imagination seen in the creation of grotesque creatures. Parallel episodes are numerous. For example, caricatured sophism in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, compared to books two and three of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.<sup>11</sup> Rabelais, like Aristophanes, coined an enormous number of interminable words, droll expressions, and sudden and surprising constructions. The humour that involves human bodily and corporeal pleasures is present in the work of both authors, who created works of ingenious life-giving happiness. This is particularly emphasised in the exodes of Aristophanes' comedies. Just these parts of the theatrical genre have strong bonds with the religious rites and early comedies that originated in fertility rituals. This again leads to the conclusion that the obscene humour of both authors – Aristophanes and Rabelais – had the same ritual roots. Once more, this is confirmation that Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque is easily applicable to the worldview of antiquity.

But to return to the myth about Demeter (and the festivities to which it is related – the Thesmophoriai and Eleusinian Mysteries) and its interpretation from the perspective of Bakhtinian theory. Namely, the central moment and turning point of the myth is in the jesting, cursing and laughing as well as in the strange, transforming figure of Bubo, that might be recognised as the rebirth and growth that transform out of the down and low and grow out of the grotesque image of the “open body”. Namely, Bakhtin relates curses and jokes to the “open body,” referring to bodies that are coupling, bodies that are giving birth or those that are being born, bodies that are dying, bodies abundantly eating and drinking, as well as

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<sup>10</sup> See Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 2, and Aristophanes, *Wasps*, episode with Philocleon.

<sup>11</sup> Janković 1987, 73-75.

emptying themselves.<sup>12</sup> So, bearing the same meaning, Iambe's act in the Hymn represents verbalisation of Baubo's grotesque image that appears not only in myth (verbally), but also in the form of a figure. There is grotesque ambivalence in the body that is reduced to its chasms, which are ironically unified: the head, sexual organs and physiological orifices merge. Top and bottom are unified and turned around – Baubo is the figure turned upside down. This corresponds to the view of Olga Freidenberg that the semantics of laughter and obscenity in festivals devoted to Demeter and the bounty Earth should be regarded with reference to the agrarian perception of men and women, reducing them only to reproductive, sexual organs.<sup>13</sup>

This Baubo is easy to connect with Bakhtin's concept that relates the mouth and eating to death and the Underworld, the meaning of which is directly connected with the fertile lower parts of the body.<sup>14</sup> This Baubo statuette evidence of her existence as a cult figure, indicates the possibility that she is an aspect, a version of Demeter.<sup>15</sup> Unlike her, there is no evidence (archaeological or otherwise) that Iambe appears anywhere apart from in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, but obviously Baubo and Iambe share the same function and may be identified with one another.<sup>16</sup>

Another ritual aspect important for understanding this myth is the role of sexuality and laughter as the turning point of Demeter's recovery from pain. Interpretation of this laughter, which as a part of

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<sup>12</sup> Bakhtin 1979, 333-335.

<sup>13</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 93. In relation to this stands also the sacrificial victim of the round bread, the semantics of which stands for both men and women sexual organs. We find the evidence for this in *Scholia* for *Luc. Mer.* VII, 4 and Atheneus. 646 a.

<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin 1979, 318. About the eating as metaphor of death and rebirth see also Freidenberg 1997, 105-108.

<sup>15</sup> Olender 1990, 99. O' Higgins 2001, 142.

<sup>16</sup> Foley explains the euphemism of Iambe's language in the Hymn by the fact that Pan-Hellenic tradition was moderated and more discrete than the local ones. Foley 1994, 46.

ritual was repeated in the Eleusinian mysteries, has to be freed from the burden of Christian censorship and other later interpretations of these mysteries. Laughter, without shame or censorship, was in antiquity related to sexuality. And though female sexuality was less appreciated, it was considered to be wilder, more dangerous and thus even funnier.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, a woman's body was in the first place understood as a fertile field, the earth ready to be ploughed. Therefore, most unusual, and least expected, was the sexuality of old women. Svetlana Slapšak points out that the outcome of the myth, in which the tabooed sexuality of Baubo brought salvation to all humanity and the fact that Baubo was not punished for, was the result of Greek democracy.<sup>18</sup> Life is able to continue only when the ultimate borders are exceeded – ultimate sorrow is confronted with the free and democratic act of the ultimate joy of everlasting sexuality.<sup>19</sup>

Parke interprets the myth about Iambe and Demeter as a personification of the lascivious and abusive words uttered by women during the Thesmophoria festival.<sup>20</sup> Another indirect connection between the Homeric Hymn and Demeter, i.e. the ritual performance of obscenities, is recognised by numerous theoreticians as an important point in the origin of the theatre, which I am going to discuss in detail in the one of the following chapters.

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<sup>17</sup> Slapšak 2004, 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 17 In her article about Baubo (*Baubo: image from archeology of misogyny*), Svetlana Slapšak questions the development of misogyny in the endangered patriarchal system through the analysis of gender relations in the period of Greek democracy, as well as the changes in these relations as the consequence of the fall of the democracy and the development of a monarchy after the disappearance of the political space for constructing male identity. Namely, this political change led to the vanishing of the ritual-democratic aspect of female sexuality; instead, female sexuality was something to be despised and laughed at. Slapšak 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Parker 1986, 86.

Widespread opinion has it that insulting, outrageous and obscene female behaviour is the origin of the iambic literary tradition. Laurie O'Higgins understands this literary form as the enactment of the control of women's behaviour precisely through the idea that such cultic acts are absolute reversals of the norms of everyday life, and recognises female ritual ribaldry only as one part of the "dialogue" which was answered by male iambic poetry, which as a male and dominant literary genre, remained preserved. The argument is based on the fact that women were the main targets of invectives and of the comic stage. O'Higgins further draws a parallel between Solonic reforms regarding women's lamentation and measures taken regarding women's humour (though not evidenced in the literary sources), since like lamentation, women's joking represents a woman's form of self-expression. From that time on, women's laughter was, according to the author, appropriated by Athenian comedy.<sup>21</sup> Women's cultic humour and jokes were silenced exactly because they represented a threat and a danger to the stability of the social order.

But let me just for the moment turn to some contemporary theories about women's humour, i.e. to the aspect of derision, depreciation and sexual connotation, which is today mainly related to men's humour.<sup>22</sup> If this is so, and if women laugh more at and make jokes about such things as puns, word jokes and self-irony stories, it might be that the other type of humour, including one that corresponds with the afore mentioned cultic women's jokes and which would, for example, deride or offend men, has not been socially acceptable. That might be the reason why women, as a dominated group, were socially discouraged from joke-telling. Nevertheless, the "repressed" women's form of joking was not necessarily aimed at ridiculing men, since "the threat to male dominance isn't women's laughing at men, the threat is women

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<sup>21</sup> O'Higgins 2001, 153, 156.

<sup>22</sup> Naranjo-Huebl 1995, 3.

laughing *with* women.”<sup>23</sup> Such a theory corresponds with and confirms the hypothesis of Laurie O’Higgins that women’s joking was damped down and controlled.

According to Milan Budimir, a Serbian theoretician and specialist in Balkan linguistics, Iambe and her obscenity are recognisable in the Balkan aboriginal word *samba* that means “hip, moving of the hips”. Its proximity to the vulva may be connected with how Iambe acts while cheering up Demeter. From this word, according to Budimir, the Greek ending *-ambo* which is also identified in some other terms denoting poetry and gods (*thriambos*, *dithurambos*) had been developed. Both terms are in old attic comedy related to Bacchus and Dionysus as well as to the cultic song which was sung during the processions.<sup>24</sup>

Demeter’s laughter that brought her back to the community and to life, and also returned her fertility powers, was provoked by insults or obscenities that indicate links with fertility. This kind of obscenity<sup>25</sup> that helped Demeter recover, reviving her and the whole of nature, should be regarded as a support to life and everlasting fertility in the face of death. I am going to term this type of healing, ritual laughter, as a life-giving one.<sup>26</sup> The aspect of fecundity is also reflected through the fact that although Demeter is divine, she herself – as the goddess of grain that incarnates fertility and procreation bringing food and life to mortals had to face the death of her own daughter Persephone whose decease and marriage turned out to be the condition necessary for life.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Budimir 1969, 101.

<sup>25</sup> Concerning Freud’s argument that obscene jokes are grounded in the obscene inclination to exhibitionism and are successful only if the person who hears them is cheerful or at least in an indifferent state of feeling, it is obvious that such theoretical argumentation is not applicable to the issue of laughter in death ritual.

<sup>26</sup> In the following episode of the Hymn, Demeter nursed the mortal child Demophoön.

## 2) Laughter in the fertility cults: life-giving laughter

In relation to the just-analysed shameful language of Iambe and its cathartic effect on the desperate and mourning Demeter, stands women's raucous joking in all-female contexts related to the festivities of the goddess Demeter and of her local versions.<sup>27</sup>

Photius and Hesychius inform us that during the festival of Stenia, which took place two days before Thesmophoria, on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Pyanepsion, women shamefully abused one another. Photius uses the term *loidorein* (to abuse), while Hesychius uses *blasfêmein* and *diaskoptein*.<sup>28</sup> At the Haloa festival dedicated to both Demeter and Dionysus and held in Eleusis, women gathered around a table full of earth's bounty, carrying representations of male and female organs and whispering vulgarities to each other:<sup>29</sup>

Monai de; gunaike- eijsporeuomenai epl apleia-  
eçousin a( boul ontai legein: kai; dh; ta; aiçcista  
ajlhla- legousi tote, ail de; iëreiai laqra/  
prosiuousai tai- gunaixi; kleyigamia- pro- to;  
out w( ajorrhthon ti sumbouleuousin. ajafwnousi  
de; pro- ajlhla- pasai ail gunaike- aiçcra; kai;  
açemna bastazousai eiðh swmatwn ajreph  
ajdreia( te kai; gunaikeia.

The women go in alone, and may say what they wish;  
and indeed they do then say the most disgusting things  
to one another, and the priestesses approach the women

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<sup>27</sup> Herodotus mentions the existence of local versions of Demeter in Epidaurus and Aegina. 5, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Brumfield 1981:80; cf. Photius s.v. *Shnia*; Hesychius s.v. *Sthnia*, *sthniwsai*

<sup>29</sup> Park suggests that the cause of the later connection of this festival to Dionysus should be seen as the exclusion of the men from the festival and in their wish to take part in it. However, this does not include the idea that men and women participated the festival together.

secretly and into their ear urge them to commit adultery as though it were some holy secret. All the women shout disgusting, blasphemous things at one another, handling the while indecent images of the body, male and female alike.<sup>30</sup>

Obviously laughter in this ritual context, the shameful language and abuses are directly linked to sexual organs and to the bounty of Earth's fruits. Male archons, who prepared those tables, were not present.<sup>31</sup> O'Higgins points out that these women made jokes more freely in the absence of men. However, in the Eleusinian Mysteries and Dionysian cults the exchange of jokes, mockery and insults sometimes existed between women and men. According to Pausanias, during the celebration of Mysian Demeter (in Achaia), after the day of men's exclusion, men and women met together in the sanctuary to exchange jeers and laughter:

Trith/ de; hmera/ th~ ebrth~ upexiasin oil ahdre-  
 ek tou ibrou, kataleipomenai de; ail gunaike-  
 drwsin ejth. Nukti; oposa nomo~ estin ajla; kai;  
 twn kunwn to; ajren. E~ de; thn epiousan  
 afikomenwn ej to; ibron twn ahdrown, ail gunaike-  
 te ej auktou; kai; aja; mero~ ej ta; gunaika- oil  
 ahdre- gelwtiv te ej ajlhrou- crwntai kai;  
 skwmmasin.

On the third day of the festival the men withdraw from the sanctuary, and the women are left to perform on that night the ritual that custom demands. Not only men are excluded, but even male dogs. On the following day the men come to the sanctuary, and the men and the women laugh and jeer at one another in turn.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Scholia to Lucian, *Dial. Meretricii* vii, 17-22, Rabe 1906.

<sup>31</sup> Scholia to Lucian, *Dial. Meret.* 6. 1 in Rabe 1906, 279 -81 cf. Parke 1986, 99.

<sup>32</sup> Pusanias, VII, 27, 10. English translation based on Pausanias Description of Greece with an English Translation by Jones, Litt, and Ormerod. Cambridge,

These kinds of festivities related to Demeter (from Eleusis or some other cultic locality) originate in the relationship between the goddess and fertility. So does the laughter that appears in this context. The phalli that are mentioned in the Haloa festival, presumably made out of clay, were brought by a girl to the field and set amid the first shoots of the season's growth. This phallic rite believed to promote the growth of the fruits, was followed by the orgy banquet. Such orgy, jokes and abuses, as well as the phallic elements and the presentation of female genitals, may be correlated to the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin that he developed about carnivalesque, that down and inner bring rebirth and renewal, wherefore obscenities and abuses created during the time of carnival as a parody of everyday life have the ability to promote recreation.<sup>33</sup> Both the clay models of phalluses and the first fruits as well as the obscene jokes, appear with the same function – regeneration and the empowerment of life forces. However, there is no evidence concerning the content of women's sexual and abusive speech, but generally it is reasonable to suppose that women's obscenities drew inspiration from their everyday activities and vocabulary related to food production or spinning and weaving.<sup>34</sup>

However, the question that arises is how does the power of carnivalesque behaviour function? The experience of boundless freedom experienced during carnivals confronts celebrants with the omnipresent fear of death. Exceeding and overcoming limits releases participants from the boundaries and fears imposed in life, but also it frees them from the fear of death as something definite and irrevocable, achieving, at least for the moment, the feeling of endlessness and immortality. Carnivals outreach the boundaries of everyday life in all aspects and phases. In exclusively female festivals characterised by women's independence and freedom

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MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1918.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

<sup>33</sup> Bakhtin 1979, 18.

<sup>34</sup> O'Higgins 2001, 149.

through liberated acting and speech (that women did not have in everyday life), they were allowed to overstep established boundaries and roles both in the framework of their family and marriage, as well in the wider context of society.

If the laughter from the fertility rituals is further subjected to the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, it is possible to recognize in it both inner and outer levels that release from censorship – both internal and external. In the other words, liberation on the inner level might be understood in a psychological sense.<sup>35</sup> This is compatible with Freud's definition according to which laughter arises out of the explosion of accumulated energy.<sup>36</sup> Release on the external level is related to the break through the boundaries and restrictions regarding decent behaviour imposed by society through intermezzo in those periods of some rituals (especially fertility rituals, related to Demeter and Dionysus) when mockery, insults, obscenities and laughter take place. The free behaviour and the laughter that was aroused during these festivals brought to its celebrants not only the feeling of freedom but also the feeling of power. If we take into account that women's roles and freedom in these festivals increased after the introduction of laws limiting their roles in the funeral rites, in which women's power and influence on the public domain was traditional, we may interpret such festivals as channels through which released power was controlled and terminated. These festivals allowed precisely type of behaviour that was improper in everyday life, either in shedding tears or in laughing. Concerning inappropriateness of such a public display of feelings, Plato wrote:

Dio; dh; gelwtwn te eifgeqai crh; twn epxaisiwn  
 kai; dakruwn, paraggelein de; pant; pant  
 ahdra, kai; o!hn pericareian pasan  
 apokruptomenon kai; periwdunian euschmonein  
 peirasqi, katav te eupragias istamenou tou

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<sup>35</sup> Bakhtin 1979, 109.

<sup>36</sup> Freud 2001, 147.

daimono~ ekastou, kai; kata; tuca~ oipn pro-  
ulyha; kai; ajanth daimonwn ajqistamenwn tisin  
prakesin, ejpizein dw ajpi; toi~ ge ajaqoisi ton  
qeon a(dwritai ponwn men epiptontwn.

Wherefore men must be restrained from untimely laughter and tears, and every individual, as well as the whole State, must charge every man to try to conceal all show of extreme joy or sorrow, and to behave himself seemly, alike in good fortune and in evil, according as each man's Genius ranges itself,--hoping always that God will diminish the troubles that fall upon them by the blessings which he bestows, and will change for the better.<sup>37</sup>

Although Plato does not mention women in particular, the reason for that should be sought in the general absence of references to women in the Greek texts. However, the expectation to be serious in everyday life was probably applied even more strictly to women than to men.<sup>38</sup> All the same, it is most often exclusively women's ritual derision and jesting that we find in the fertility cults of Demeter and Dionysus.

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<sup>37</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 5, 732 c; 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 Shorey, P. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1969. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>. Regarding the inappropriateness of laughter, see also Plato, *Republic* 3.387b-d; 606c.

<sup>38</sup> "What applied to 'respectable' men applied even more strictly and narrowly to 'respectable' women, although in the case of women the philosophers usually did not engage in direct admonitions, which were seen as the responsibility of a woman's male relatives." O' Higgins 2001, 144.

### 3) Women-only festivals in the social context (Thesmophria and Adonia)

Thesmophoria, the Athenian festival dedicated to Demeter connected with seed-time, occurred in almost every part of the Greek world during the month of Pyanopsion, in the period of autumn ploughing. Through the celebration of Thesmophoria, women had to provide and ensure fertility for the whole polis, and despite the support of male citizens who organised and helped the celebration of the festival financially, men were not allowed to participate in it.<sup>39</sup> Apart from the male exclusion from the festivities themselves, during the period of Thesmophoria, no public business or sacrifices were allowed for the men in the polis.<sup>40</sup> These kinds of celebrations were characteristic of women's autonomy and were form of intrusion by women into public space.<sup>41</sup> The ritual was organised and presided over by female officials, who dealt with the priestess and all issues necessary for the festival (wine, grain, oil, money).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Burkert 1985, 242. It is certain, according to Burkert, that wives of citizens had the main role in Thesmophoria but also other women (concubines and those unmarried) took part in it. However, Dillon claims that, although there is evidence about this in the literature (Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousae*, Lucian), the presence of *heteirai* is not probable. However, there is an opposed view of Humphreys, who does not accept the position of Burkert and Detienne (1979), that during those festivities women actually took over the polis, since these festivals coincided with the time when farmers were busy and out of the polis anyway. Humphreys 1993, xxiv 61f. Even if this was one of the reasons for women's autonomy, it does not exclude the fact of the women's independence and that they took over dominance, at least for the defined period of the festival.

<sup>40</sup> Foley 1994, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Winkler 1991, 194. Zeitlin 1996, 401.

<sup>42</sup> *Anthesteriai* were not organised only in Athens, but through the whole of Attica, and there were some slight differences in organisational structure. In Piraeus, for example, there was a male deme official who was responsible for the organisation together with a female priest. But usually, if men did take part in the organisation of the whole event, it was restricted only to the financial

Widespread opinion, originating from Deubner's point of view, is that Thesmophoria was connected with the festival of Skira that preceded it, and took place in the summer season. The ritual of this "introductory" festival consisted of putting different offerings, such as sacrificed piglets, models of snakes and male genital organs into deep caverns.<sup>43</sup> Decayed items were then taken out and recovered during the central activity of Thesmophoria, when a group of women, *Antlêtriai*, were obliged to abstain from the sexual intercourse for three days before the festivities, then brought rotten items from the caves (bones and rotten flesh of piglets) to the altars of Thesmophorion.<sup>44</sup> While approaching the pits, *Antlêtriai* were clapping and shouting in order to scare and cast out the snakes that were believed to live in those chasms. The remains that were dug out were afterwards sprinkled with seed and this offering was believed to have fertility powers. The mixture of raw and cooked offerings to Demeter was regarded to be a sacrifice made in gratitude to Demeter for her great gift to people – grain.

Seen from this point of view, terminology related to the above-mentioned sacrifice undoubtedly points to the relationship between fertility and the life cycle, to extinguishing and to invigoration. The term for piglet – *choiros/choiron* in the Greek language was also used to denote vulva, wherefore, its contextualisation in Thesomophoria reveals a symbolic ambiguity: death (piglets) and fertility (of vulva).<sup>45</sup> Young piglets die and

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management, while all the organization closely related to the ritual was women's thing. Dillon 2002, 112.

<sup>43</sup> Parke 1986, 83.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Usually among comedian poets. In the meaning of vulva, *coiro-/*appears several times in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. Also Varro informs us about the relationship between *piga* and female fertility:

Prisci quoque Latini, etiam Graeci in Italia idem factitasse videntur. Nam et nostrae mulieres, maxime nutrices, naturam qua feminae sunt in virginibus appellant porcum, et Graecae choeron, significantes essedignum insigne nuptiarum.

decompose in order to provide next year's crop. The symbol of the snake's ability to regain youth is embodied in the word *gêras*, which means both old age and snake's skin, and is related to the snake's ability to shed it every year.

Women camped in the fields during the whole duration of the Thesmophoria festivities. After assembling on the first day – the Ascent (*Anodos*), they abstained from solid food on the second day (the Fasting or the Middle day). Sitting on the ground, women acted out Demeter's pain. On the same day, after ending with lamentation, participants, beating each other with scourges called *morroton*, started to exchange *aischrologia* (*abuses*) – ritual cursing, abusing each other and saying obscenities, revealing “things that may not be spoken” and using the same shameful language with cathartic effect for mourners that Iambe used in order to cheer up Demeter.<sup>46</sup> It is possible to recognise here powerful ambivalence. Offending and destroying was at the same time the means and cause of regeneration and rebirth.

The festival of Thesmophoria thus included mourning as well as gay and vivid parts of the celebration – the fast and the feast. Froma Zeitlin understands this ambiguity of ritual celebration as parallelism between the “anti-festival” and the festival, interpreting this as duplication of roles – as if mourning would be adequate for the followers of Demeter, while the followers of Dionysus would take part in joyful celebration.<sup>47</sup> Gail Holst-Warhaft points out that the fertility women-only festivals (Thesmophoria, Anthesteria, Eleusenina mysteries and Adonia) reveal a connection between

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The ancient Latins as well as the Greeks in Italy, seem to have done the same. Our women, particularly nurses, give the name porcus (pig) to the feature, which makes maidens female, and Greek women call it choiros (pig), signifying that there are ready for marriage. Varro, *Res Rustica* 2. 4. 9-10. (My translation).

<sup>46</sup> Apollodorus, I, 5, 1; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 378E; Demosthenes, 30,5; Diodorus mentions exchange of obscenities in the same ritual, in Siracusa. Diod., 5, 4, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Zeitlin 1996, 401.

rituals performed for the god or goddess and mourning for the dead.<sup>48</sup> Seen from such a point of view, the fact that these kinds of festivals are celebrated through the shift between vivacious and mourning atmospheres – the expressions of two sides of a genuine feeling provoked by confrontation with the forces of life and death and in which a women’s role is dominant and autonomous, led some authors to the conclusion that they appear as a kind of compensation for the restricted role of women in funerals.<sup>49</sup> Burkert even claims that during the period of the festival, women took over the city.

Vivacious celebration of the Thesmophoria festival began on the third day<sup>50</sup> and was called *Kalligenia* –“fair offspring”. It was the climax of the festivities and women usually exchanged their thoughts – worries and hopes about their pregnancies, children and the whole family. Thus Demeter was celebrated not only as the goddess of the corn crop, but also as the goddess of human fertility, although in the classical period, Greeks made a clear distinction between fertility of women and fertility of Earth.<sup>51</sup>

There are numerous studies about women-only festivals that show the tendency to equate them with each other. There is no doubt that to a certain extent such identification is justified, at least when the focus of the analysis refers to the oldest strata of religion and thought embodied in these festivals that, as we have seen, do embody early worldviews according to which “serious” and “parodic” aspects of life/death always coexist side by side, representing preconditions for one another – death, decay and mourning are transformed through celebration, humour and laughter into the obscene domain (that is directly related to fertility and rebirth) and into life.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Holst-Warhaft 1995, 100.

<sup>49</sup> Alexiou 2002, 21; Holst-Warhaft 1995, 117.

<sup>50</sup> It is possible that *aischrologia* were exchanged also on the first day, but this assumption is usually rejected. Dillon 2002, 114.

<sup>51</sup> O’Higgins 2001, 153.

<sup>52</sup> O’Higgins emphasises that in the classical period Greeks made a distinction between the fertility of women and the fertility of the earth . Thereupon, the

However, on another level, women-only festivals do vary, revealing also other aspects of social order that are tightly related to sexuality, but within the concrete historical, political and social context.<sup>53</sup>

Jean-Pierre Vernan interprets the relationship between the goddess Demeter and human fertility and marriage through structural analysis of the myth about the Golden Age, referring to the social structures of the Greek polis and its religion. The starting point for Vernant's analysis is the myth about the end of the Golden Age as retold by Hesiod, in which Vernant recognises the origin of two

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relationship between these two types of fertility might be related to earlier periods. In order to explain this more thoroughly, I am going to turn my attention to the interpretation of Olga Freidenberg regarding archaic thought and its development and change through the agrarian stage. Exactly in this phase, according to Freidenberg, came the splitting of the existing idea about life and death as a common concept. In the agrarian phase, the old concept of the cosmogonic unity of laughter and tears, incarnating appearing and disappearing of the totem, split. Tears started to denote death, while laughter became related to life, but they continued to exist side by side in myths and rituals. This is exactly what we find in fertility rituals, in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, and in the funeral or marriage rituals. In the context of this split, but unified concept of life and death, ritual laments, acting out Demeter's pain and fasting in the Thesmophorian ritual signify death, while the next phase of ritual - joking, jesting and laughing signify renewal of life. The chain continuously repeats – death appears as a source of new life – the whole of living nature is included. This, according to Olga Freidenberg, is not the result of understanding the ambiguity of life and death, but the atavism of the former, primeval perception of life and death, which was characterised by perceiving them as one. Life and death were one merging concept, without any borders or any contradictions that are currently our way of comprehending those, for us, opposed and binary states. O'Higgins 2001, 153, Freidenberg 1997, 94.

<sup>53</sup> For the most detailed recent study devoted to women-only festivals see Dillon 2002. Excellent analysis of one similar women only festival *revena*, in Vojvodina (Serbia) and its disappearance in the period of modernization in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is given in the article "Dan raspusnog življenja" by Miroslava Malešević. See Malešević 2007.

cultural issues crucial for Greek society.<sup>54</sup> The first one is related to introduction of the animal sacrifice to the gods, which at the same time means the beginning of the cultivated consumption of meat (that has to be cooked) in contrast to devouring raw animals and cannibalism. At the same time, the end of the Golden Age marks the beginning of the period when people started taking responsibility for production of their food. In other words, it denotes the beginning of agriculture. Consumption of meat meant at the same time the introduction of sacrificing into Greek religion that presents the cornerstone of Greek democracy and religion. The other crucial institution of Greek society linked to the development of agriculture is the institution of marriage. With the fall of the Golden Age people not only started to provide food for themselves. In parallel, according to the myth, they were deprived of immortality, whereupon they had to take care that life continued through their offspring, and they started to form legal relationships involving the new race of women. The central role of the institution of marriage lies in its ability to provide paternal filiations. Vernant draws close parallels between cereal plants and the human condition and between ploughing and marriage, in which a wife is understood as a furrow and a husband as labourer. According to Vernant, exactly this parallel is the reason that the goddess of agriculture became the patron of marriage and human offspring. The purpose of marriage, according to the author, lies in the effort to mediate women's wilderness.<sup>55</sup>

However, sexuality in the Greek world was not absolutely regulated through the institution of marriage. In this sense, an

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<sup>54</sup> During the Golden Age people lived like gods – they were immortal, they did not have to work for their food since there was abundance of it on the Earth, they did not eat meat and the race of women did not exist yet. People were punished for Prometheus' cheating in the first offering of a meat sacrifice to the gods. Namely, Prometheus successfully cheated Zeus into making him to choose the part of the sacrificial offer with animal fat, thinking that under the fat was the meat. However, instead of the meat, Zeus found only the bones. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 508 sqq.

<sup>55</sup> Vernant 1996, 152.

extremely interesting study by Marcel Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis* argues that there is opposition between festivals devoted to Demeter and Adonis, representing a divinity of sexuality that is seductive, passionate but infertile and as such related to the concept of love of *hêtairai* (courtesans entirely devoted to love) and to *korai* (young girls defined by their virginal status, but also by their unrestrained, as yet uncultivated nature). Detienne accepts the thesis of Vernant that Demeter, as the goddess of human fertility, emanates from the Greek concept of marriage in which a woman is perceived as a furrow, while her husband is a labourer that plows her, since the aim of their relationship is fertilisation and giving birth to children. So, when a young girl enters marriage, claims Detienne, she automatically enters the domain of the deity of cereals. This study of Detienne, which abandons the Frazerian type of classical interpretation of Adonis as a mere vegetation spirit type of god is a good example of contextualisation and the structural analysis of the myths and rituals related to the divinity of Eastern origin in the concrete context of 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century Athens. What Detienne does is, first of all, to decipher and interpret the Adonis myth using other analogous myths, with all their specificities. The analogies that the researcher establishes are not mere parallels between figures or legends, but relationships and relative positions of the various elements that may connect them. Detienne also reads the meaning of the god through the restoration of the network of relationships, linking him to and opposing him with other deities, paying attention to each detail of the myth within certain contexts. The cross-references that are made with myths about Adonis and other deities are based, in the first place, upon minute review of evidence from other areas of the material, concerning the social and spiritual life of the Greeks. The central issue for enlightening the context of Adonis' ritual is focused on spices as the plants that are related to this divinity. Grown by women, practitioners of Adonia, this kind of plant (i.e. their substitutes – lettuce and fennel) are characterised by extremely quick germination; the usual ritual during the festival of women is planting the spices into pots positioned high up on the

rooftops of their houses (their private domain) accessed by the leaders. These useless and fragrant aphrodisiac plants grew and perished within eight days, and exactly this characteristic of quick ripening and failing forms a link to the sexuality of Adonis' cult. Concerning other details of the ritual itself that point to the same conclusion, Adonia was celebrated during the so called Dog Days, the period when the Earth and the Sun come closest. It is the hottest period of the summer season, when women experience sensual abandonment, ripening with sensuality. The excessively carnal nature of Adonis and his extreme adolescent passionate nature made him prematurely impotent and unable to enter marriage. The love celebrated within his festival is the same – passionate, seductive but infertile.<sup>56</sup> Being necessary also for marriage, such love that was praised within the Adonia festival, represents both an internal and an external threat to marriage, causing matrons to reject their status, exchanging it for that of a courtesan, thus turning marriage into an instrument of sensual enjoyment.<sup>57</sup> Regarding these festivals as celebrating specific types of sexuality, Detienne contrasts Adonia and Thesmophoria. The two rituals, put side by side, express the incompatibility of Adonis and Demeter and their rituals respectively celebrating seduction and marriage.

However, this position of Detienne stands in absolute opposition to other interpretations that argue that Thesmophoria is not a festival of reaffirmation of religious and social codes of 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, but on the contrary, the space where women's freedom, autonomy and power were practiced. Although Detienne's study is a brilliant example of structural analysis applied in the context of the 5<sup>th</sup> century ritual of Adonis, its weak points are obvious when we come to his analysis of Thesmophoria. Positioning the Adonia into the detailed schematic structure, not all the elements that constitute the system are researched in detail and sometimes

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<sup>56</sup> There was also ancient Greek proverb "You are more sterile than the Gardens of Adonis", which alludes to the nature of the Adonian sexuality.

<sup>57</sup> Detienne 1994, xiii.

they are reduced to a mere framework. Thus the Thesmophoria festival is interpreted only in relation to Adonia, and only in the aspect which relates it one specific kind of sexuality/love – not that of the courtesans, but of matrons. Appearing exclusively as a reference point in the system, the interpretation of Thesmophoria remained reduced to a single meaning (that of celebrating the ideology of marriage) without being considered in the wider social and religious context.

At this point I would like to turn to the position offered by John Winkler, an anthropologist in the field of gender in antiquity, who grounds his theories in the research of traditional Mediterranean societies. His main argument against Detienne’s position regarding the strong identification of Thesmophoria with the religion of polis and his emphasis on interpreting men as those responsible for raising plants and “ploughing their wives’ furrows”, is aimed at Detienne’s ignoring the notion of women’s autonomy in exclusively female rituals such as Thesmophoria, and their communication on such occasions, as well as of independent women’s consciousness.<sup>58</sup> Another question that I am going to explore a little bit further, is to what extent this women’s autonomy endangers or reaffirms social order. Precisely this issue of restricting and controlling women in religious festivals opens a crucial question in numerous traditional patriarchal Balkan societies, in which the power and threat of women’s influence exist exactly in the domains that exclusively belonged to women – rituals. It is a double position – on the one hand, it reveals the strong need of society to establish control over women in the restricted frames of ritual; on the other hand, women draw power precisely from the competence and authority that traditionally belonged to them in the religious and ritual sphere.

John Winkler emphasises that the crucial element in the Adonia and Thesmophoria festivals was female socialisation. This is always about sharing knowledge and in the case of those two festivals, it is the knowledge about men’s erôs (their adequacy and

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<sup>58</sup> Winkler 1991, 194, 199.

inadequacy) that is crucial.<sup>59</sup> Winkler developed this idea in the article “The Laughter of the Oppressed: Demeter and The Gardens of Adonis”, arguing that women’s rituals devoted to Demeter and Adonis are testimonies to alternative/women’s codes of sex and gender. Pointing to the fact that the topic of female ritual lasciviousness has been, since antiquity, burdened with a veil of taboo, Winkler emphasizes that the issue has been problematic both for ancient authors and for contemporary researchers. Namely, the reports about such festivals are written exclusively by men, to whom entry to such ritual gatherings was forbidden. Therefore, these descriptions are burdened with “a certain discomfort at the spectacle of women in groups laughing uproariously as they handle genital-shaped cookies and other objects of sexual significance.”<sup>60</sup> Arguing that this kind of celebration represented liberation and sexual playfulness, Winkler compares female jokes from the fertility rituals with myths about goddesses abducting young mortals, and comes to the conclusion that dormant lovers represent the same social allegory about men’s dormant and marginal role in the process of reproduction.<sup>61</sup> All those myths are about a goddess (Eos, Aphrodite etc.) who falls in love with a young, beautiful mortal, but after a while abandons him in some hidden place – mountain, forest, cave.

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<sup>59</sup> Winkler 1991, 206.

<sup>60</sup> Winkler 1991, 188. To support this argument we might recall the contemporary attitude towards women’s jokes and the stereotypical assertion that women lack a sense of humour, both in telling or in understanding jokes. This stereotype actually has its roots in the long process of censorship or misinterpretation of women’s humour. So, it is about ignoring and not recognising women’s humour, as well as about the evaluation of what is really laughable, which is defined by the dominant group. Studies by Mahadev Apte and Linda Naranjo-Huebel reveal that women’s humour is less focused on derision and more on irony and self-deprecation, word jokes, puns and anecdotal stories. Naranjo-Huebl 1995, 3-4.

<sup>61</sup> One such myth also documented in *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (218-238) is about Eos who falls in love with Tithonos and therefore asks Zeus to make him immortal, but forgets to ask for Tithonos’ everlasting youth; very soon Tithonos grows old and Eos decides to hide him and keeps him closed.

Winkler further develops his idea interpreting Adonis, not as a vegetation spirit who disappears, but as a man whose disappearance signifies that he is impotent. In these kinds of stories retold by Greek men as form of warning about female powers, the author recognises the reflection of fear of impotence or castration. Winkler interprets all the scary stories about those who had evidenced female privacy and were punished (Theiresias, Aktaion) as frightening examples that had served to keep men away from women's private space.<sup>62</sup>

The social connotation of the festival and its purpose in re-establishing the female community through the meeting of mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends is also pointed out by Laurie O'Higgins. The author understands joking in this context as a supportive instrument for reinforcing the bonds among them, as well as a way of exchanging the reproductive knowledge that allowed women to control their own fertility.<sup>63</sup> Thus, female ribaldry is not only a reaction to dominant, male culture, but also a sub-cultural mechanism that assisted women in gaining control over their bodies. O' Higgins even suggests that these exclusively female rituals with free ribaldry and obscenities appear as an occasion for revolution. Without neglecting the dimension of women's independent socialisation and the overcoming of sexual taboos, as Detienne does, Burkert argues that such rituals, in spite of, and even due to, obscenities and offences, actually contribute to the release and playing up of antagonism towards the opposite sex.<sup>64</sup> This position of Burkert corresponds to that of Jean Duvignaud, who claims that such festivals cannot exist out of the political/social structure.<sup>65</sup>

However, let me once more go back to Bakhtin and to his concept of the "double worldview" grounded in a different perception of time. Referring to the Medieval culture, Bakhtin relates

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 202-206.

<sup>63</sup> O'Higgins 2001, 153, 156.

<sup>64</sup> Burkert 1998, 105.

<sup>65</sup> Burkert 1985, 258-59, Duvignaud 1971, 23.

the official worldview to the hierarchy and seriousness of everyday life in the framework of the medieval Church-state system, while the second worldview is freed from all the dogmatism and fear related to the first one.<sup>66</sup> The unofficial one, the carnivalesque, is, as part of folk tradition, related to carnivals of antiquity, such as the aforementioned Thesmophoria. If we put it the other way around and apply Bakhtin's theory to antiquity, we easily recognise in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens the state and its controlling structure with the "official" worldview related to and controlled by the political system of the polis, i.e. its democracy in which only adult male Athenians participated and from which women, as well as slaves and foreigners (*metekoi*), were excluded. The shift from the "official" to the "unofficial" happened exactly during the women-only festivals and other festivals devoted to Dionysos, i.e. all those occasions on which participating in the ritual meant, above all, confrontation with the forces of life and death. As in medieval carnivals, these festivals filled with laughter were space and time for freedom and autonomy for those who did not have them "officially". The capacity for using the potential of space for freedom and independence was exploited differently – from re-establishing the women's social community, reinforcing bonds among women or exchanging knowledge as in the case of Thesmophoria, to transformation and "cultivation" in dramatic form as in the case of Great Dionysia, which will be the subject of one of the following chapters.

#### **4) From fertility to death rituals: flowers devoted to the dead**

Gia; ije-; kairo; pou; dial exe-, Care mou, na; ton  
parh-,  
Na; pare- t« aḥqh oç ta; bounay Ieloudia apo;  
tou-; kampou-.

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<sup>66</sup> Bakhtin 1979, 15.

See what a time you have chosen, my Charos, to take  
blossoms  
from the mountains and flowers from the plains!<sup>67</sup>

Let me now leave the subject of reading fertility rituals in the context of constituted city-states and return to the level of depositing different worldviews and concepts in complex ritual meanings. The subject of this chapter is the relationship between fertility and funeral rituals, i.e. traces of the agrarian worldview in the praxis of leaving flowers on the grave, a custom that has still not disappeared today.

In light of the theory of Olga Freidenberg about early, totemic thought that perceives the world as undivided and unsplit, human life equals the life of nature. Without the ability to recognise and realise distinction between the biological acts of eating, procreation or death, primeval people understood that they only repeated cosmic actions and that they functioned the same as the Sky, the Sun or the Earth. Thereupon, at the agrarian stage of society and of thought, the former solar totem was replaced by a vegetative one, and humans started to identify themselves with plants, including in their domain of cyclical nature. The dead became seeds, and death became a condition for new life. The deceased was perceived as a source of new life<sup>68</sup> in the same way that the house of Hades, the place of the dead, was at the same time the womb of the Earth, from which emerged all its bounty.<sup>69</sup> A flower that dies in the Earth grows again, and this was seen as a metaphor for the rebirth of the deceased.<sup>70</sup> That is the reason why flowers are laid on graves on the day of death, or on the day of remembering the dead, *Genesia*, the

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<sup>67</sup> Modern Greek lament, collected by Politis 1909 cf. Alexiou 2002, 197.

<sup>68</sup> “The Fruits of Demeter” are breads as well as the dead Athenians. Herodt. IV, 198, VII, 141, 142; Plutarch *De Fac. In Orb. Lun.* 28, Porphyry. DA II, 6, Dion. Hal. VII, 72, 15. “The first people grow as fruits”. Luc. *Philops.*3. Freideberg 1997, 85-86.

<sup>69</sup> Another name for Hades is *Ploutôn* (Wealth-Giver).

<sup>70</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 177.

festival that was later identified with the birthday of the deceased. From the period of Solon's legislation, *Genesia* was the collective celebration of remembering all the dead. It was celebrated on the 5<sup>th</sup> of Boedromion, corresponding to our September, the period of abundance of Earth's fruits, and preceding by a few days the Eleusinian mysteries. Solon's legislation concerning *Genesia* as a festival of All Souls Day that was celebrated collectively was one of the efforts made by the state to control aristocratic clans and to take over family practices.<sup>71</sup>

Numerous examples from Greek literature and folk traditions dating from antiquity all the way up to modern times reveal a juxtaposition of humans and nature. We come across the fragment from Euripides' in which "life is reaped like fruitful corn" – **bion qerizen wšte karpimon stacun.**<sup>72</sup> The word denoting young stalks of wheat – *stachus* also bears the meaning of young human offspring. Similar symbolism exists in one of Melegre's epigrams:

aijai, pou to; poqienon ejnoi; qal o-f atpasen  
Aida-,  
atpasen: akmaion d« aħqo- elfure koni-.

Alas, where is my lovely shoot? Seized by Hades,  
seized!  
Dust has defiled the flower in full bloom.<sup>73</sup>

Elements recognisable in folk traditions that concern the theme of life and death in relation to the vegetation, may be traced firstly to the tradition of ritual lamentations, in which the realm of vegetation appears as a symbolic domain that enables talking about tabooed death through allusion. This allusive method as a kind of artistic language economy is characteristic for folk traditions and for

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<sup>71</sup> Parke 1986, 53.

<sup>72</sup> Euripides *Hippolytuss*, Fr. 757 Nauck.

<sup>73</sup> *AP* 7. 476.7 -8. Epigram dates at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. Cf. Alexiou 2002, 195.

the ritual lament in particular, not only in Greece but universally.<sup>74</sup> However, this argument may be taken as consistent with the theory of Olga Freidenberg discussed above, about folk traditions functioning as a repository for conserved earlier phases of thought. Another epigram from Larisa (second or third century AD) relates the theme of death and impossibility of sexual fulfilment. It is about the maiden who died in the flower of her youth, just when “shown her petals ready for her wedding.”<sup>75</sup>

The relationship between the festival of the dead and flowers growing from the earth can be found in the scene on a plate from the Phaistos (Minoan period) representing women dancing on either side of an armless and legless female who grows out from the earth with her head turned towards a large flower, recalling flower-picking Persephone. W. Burkert associates this scene with the festival of the dead in Mesará and the dancing practice carried out in the precincts of the tombs. Similar scenes of <descent (*afhodo-*) of the Mistress of the Underworld are numerous on the clay model temples from the Subminoan and Geometric periods. On the round pot-like containers, the goddess, in an attitude of epiphany, is visible from the waist up. One such example is known from the Spring Chamber shrine at Knosos, near the place where the shrine of Demeter was later built.<sup>76</sup>

The relationship with flowers is also evident in the name of the month Anthesterion when City Dionysia, the festival of Dionysus, related to the theatre, was celebrated. The term for this month, which originates in flower terminology, is directly linked to the souls of the dead *Kêres* (“Dear ones”) that appear during that

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<sup>74</sup> Alexiou 2002, 185.

<sup>75</sup> Peek 988, Cf. Alexiou 2002, 196. Obviously, the same symbolism can be recognized in many modern languages in the phrase that I have just used “the flower of youth”.

<sup>76</sup> Burkert 1998, 42.

period on Earth in the form of flowers.<sup>77</sup> The word *Kêres* has the same root as the word *kômos* – a vivid Dionysian procession, from which derives the composite *kômôidos* (comic actor) and *kômodia*.<sup>78</sup> Recognising in the Dionysian procession its obscene content and *ithuphallos*, Milan Budimir offers the etymology for this word family, locating its origin in the ancient Greek Indo-European epoch. He relates *kômos* to the old Indic *kāmah* – *lust, excitement, love*, recognising in those two terms the same semantic nucleus, as well as phonetic and morphological identicalness. He also defines the laughter related to *kômos* and *kômodia* as ritual laughter. This is the same life-giving, ritual laughter that appears in Eleusian mysteries. When the divine child laughs, marking the beginning of the Golden Age in Vergil's 4<sup>th</sup> Eclogue, this is again ritual laughter. The laughter, jokes and obscenities that are characteristic of the Dionysian festivals and processions are understood by the author not only as a principle of rebirth and renewal (as this may be interpreted using the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin or Olga Freidenberg), but also as having an apotropaic function against the Dead. In the ultimate case, these interpretations do not exclude one another. If the obscenity is something that brings renewal it may, at the same time, appear as an antidote to the powers of the Underworld.

A direct connection between fertility and funeral rituals is also embodied in two different aspects of the goddess Demeter. Namely, in the fragment from Euripides *Suppliant Women*, mothers of the seven Argives who died in Thebes, came before the shrine of Demeter in Eleusis during the festival of *Proerosia* held on the 5<sup>th</sup> Pyanepsion (preceding the festival of Thesmophoria). Aethra tried to convince her son, Theseus, to help mourning mothers by persuading the Thebans to give them back the bodies of their fallen sons.

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<sup>77</sup> If we apply the argument of Olga Freidenberg about the relationship between the solar and the agrarian totem to Budimir's identification of flowers with the dead, it is possible to interpret the terminology for the month Anthesterion as an example of conservation of a forgotten unified conception of the world that identifies nature (plants) with humans.

<sup>78</sup> Budimir 1969, 105-106.

nekroux de; toux- ojlwota- dori;  
 qayai qelouswn twnde mhterwn cqoni;  
 eiɣgousin oil kratounte- ouɣ j ajairesin  
 dounai qelousi, nomim j ajtizonte- qewn.

koinon de; forton taɣsd j eɣwn creia- ejnh-  
 |Adrasto- omma dakrusin teggnw oɣe  
 keitai, tov t j eɣco- thn te dustucestathn  
 stenwn strateian hn epemyen ek domwn:  
 of m j eɣotrunei paid j eɣon peisai litai-

nekrwn komisthn h| logoisin h| doro-  
 rlmh/ genesqai kai; taifou metaition,  
 monon tov d j eɣgon prostiqei- ejnw/ teknw/  
 poliei t j jAqhwn. tugcanw d j uɣer cqono-  
 ajrotou proqou-, ek domwn ej qou- j ejnw

nekrwn komisthn h| logoisin doro-  
 rlmeh/ genesqai kai; taifou metaition,  
 monon tov d j eɣgon prostiqei- ejnw/ teknw/  
 poliei t j jAqhwn. tugcanw d j uɣer cqono-  
 ajrotou proqou- j ek domwn ej qou- j ejnw

pro- tonde shkon, eɣqa prwta fainetai  
 frika- upe; gh- thsde karpimo- stacu-  
 desmon d j aɣesmon tond j eɣousa fullado-  
 menw pro- aɣnai- eɣscarai- duoin qeain  
 Korh- te kail Dhmhro-, oiktirousa men

polia- apaida- tasde mhtera- tekwn,  
 sebousa d j iera; stemmat j

So now their mothers would bury in the grave the dead, whom the spear has slain, but the victors prevent them and will not allow them to take up the corpses, holding the laws of the gods in no honor. Here lies Adrastus on the ground with streaming eyes, sharing with them the

burden of their prayer to me, and bemoaning the havoc of the sword and the sorry fate of the warriors whom he led from their homes. And he urges me to use entreaty to persuade my son to take up the dead and help to bury them, either by winning words or force of arms, laying on my son and on Athens this task alone. Now it happened that I had left my house and come to offer sacrifice on behalf of the earth's crop at this shrine, where first the fruitful corn showed its bristling shocks above the soil. And here at the holy altars of the two goddesses, Demeter and the Maiden, I wait, holding these sprays of foliage, a bond that does not bind, in compassion for these childless mothers, grey with age, and in reverence for the sacred garlands.<sup>79</sup>

What is the relationship between the seed-celebration and Demeter, to the demand of Suppliant women? How is it possible to relate the celebration of nature's everlasting rebirth to the effort of getting back the bodies of dead sons, and thus providing them with some kind of rebirth? Applying the theory of Olga Freidenberg, a possible interpretation of the term for the dead – *Demetreioi*, would be that it originates in the agrarian stage when the “fruits of Demeter” were also the dead who were equivalent to the seed and corn that were, according to the custom, sowed on the graves.<sup>80</sup> This thesis is also confirmed by the role of Demeter as a subterranean divinity, Chthonia.<sup>81</sup> Without doubt, the goddess's connection with death appears side-by-side with aspects of fertility and procreation, and death appears as an inseparable part of life.<sup>82</sup> At this point, where we come across different (or opposed) aspects of the goddess

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<sup>79</sup> Euripides, *The Suppliants*, 18- 36. Greek text by Gilbert Murray, English translation by E. P. Coleridge <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

<sup>80</sup> Alcaeus, *Fragments*.

<sup>81</sup> Pausanias, II, 35, 4-8; III, 14, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 52.

Demeter, a possible interpretation might arise from Maria Gimbutas theory about the Old European Great Goddess.

## **5) Appendix and pretext: the concept of life-death-rebirth in the religious context of Old European Neolith and Greek dis/continuities – the theory of Maria Gimbutas**

This chapter addresses the early religious ideas of the Old European Neolithic religion before the invasion of the Indo-Europeans (in other words, the period between 7000 BC and 3000 BC) through the prism of Maria Gimbutas thinking. This theme offers an additional perspective upon and deeper understanding of life/death concepts during this period, and clearer insight into the later preservation of the concepts, particularly through the cults of the divinities that inherited the Great Goddess, especially those interesting for us – Demeter and Persephone. Maria Gimbutas based her research on archaeological data referring to one goddess manifested in countless forms related to various cyclical phases. The focus of the Old European Great Goddess is centred on the active and productive feminine force that influences the life cycle and its different phases: birth, nurturing, growth, death and regeneration of all living nature: human, animals and plants.

Different figurines and other ceramic art representing the Great Goddess often display unusual modifications, particularly exaggerated bulk, or emphasised generative organs – breasts and vulva or buttocks (a representation of giving and sustenance).<sup>83</sup> These kind of nurturing/regenerating symbols appear sometimes even on tombs, such as, for example, presentations of breasts on the walls of megalithic tombs, which attest to the relationship between

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<sup>83</sup> In the opinion of Maria Gimbutas, in the Neolithic period and earlier, obscenity did not exist as a concept that surrounded the naked male or female body. Gimbutas 2001, 5.

the Old European Goddess and death and regeneration.<sup>84</sup> Through a detailed analysis of different forms of the Neolithic goddess, Gimbutas discerns diverse Life-Giving and Life-Sustaining images of the Great Goddess, and this specific and precise mapping may be helpful in identifying particular Greek goddesses of the Olympian pantheon as heiresses of the Neolithic Goddess that unifies different phases of the life cycle.

The Birth Giving Goddess appears as a life source of all nature, including humans, plants and animals. It is significant that the Goddess is connected with moisture, which had a direct connection to the watery realm of a woman's womb. This symbolism of water is also recognised by Gimbutas in abstract forms, often in decoration using goddess images on ceramics, such as nets and lines (as well as ovals, circles, and lozenges) representing streams, but also in the association with different animals related to the water realm, especially frogs, snakes, fish etc.<sup>85</sup> Figurines of this goddess often appear in threes, and Gimbutas considers the Birth Giving Goddess as recognisable in the Greek Moirai, threefold goddesses of fate, as well as in Artemis Eileithyia who protects women during their birth-giving.<sup>86</sup> This Neolithic Life-Giving Image of the Goddess with a child is represented also in the presentation of Mother and child that became canonical in Christianity. Sometimes mother and child figures appear in the shape of human bodies with animal (bear) masks on the faces. The inclusion of animals, especially bears and deer is typical for the Birth-Giving Goddess, and we come across these animals either as the incarnation of the Goddess, or as her escort. In the Greek religion, both bears and deer are related to Artemis. Gimbutas traces the history of bear goddess, representing death and regeneration, in the Upper Paleolithic period and relates

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<sup>84</sup> Gimbutas 2001, 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>86</sup> According to Lucian, *Moirai* inhabit the Underworld. These three sisters – *Klóta* (Spinner), *Lachêsa* (Destiny), *Atrpopa* (Inexorable), present from the moment of one's birth, make decisions about the destiny of mortals and immortals. Homer, *Iliad*, XVI, 431.

this symbolism with bears' winter hibernation that metaphorically represents death.<sup>87</sup> The same analogy lies in the seasonal appearance and disappearance of deer's antlers. Concerning Life-Sustaining Images, Gimbutas mentions Birds and the Bird Goddess who, as an inhabitant of both terrestrial and celestial realms, links earthly life and the beyond. Similarly, the Snake Goddess unifies two domains: water and ground. Apart from the habitation areas of this goddess, her regenerative symbolism lies in her slough shedding. Regarding life and regeneration of all nature, particularly the aspect of the annual cycle of germination, growth and harvest, the embodiment of this principal lies in the images of the vegetation goddess known as Old European Mother Earth. Through the pregnancy of this goddess, the relationship between the fertility of nature and female fertility are established. In association with Mother Earth and the process of ripening, lies a pig as an animal that fattens very quickly.<sup>88</sup> This animal has been already mentioned in the context of her festival of Thesmoforia and the goddess Demeter, who appears as a successor of this goddess in Olympian Pantheon.<sup>89</sup>

All the same, as the goddess appears as the emanation of life, she appears as well and at the same time, as the emanation of death, since in the Old European Religious System, death did not present an end, but rather a state that preceded regeneration.<sup>90</sup>

As has already been mentioned, a bird appears as the Birth Giving Goddess, but in the same realm of the celestial, birds, especially birds of pray and owls, are, in the later folklore related exclusively to the sphere of death. Gimbutas explains the connection between birds of pray and death through the Neolithic religious custom of disposing corpses to be excarnated before burial. So,

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<sup>87</sup> Gimbutas 2001, 13.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>89</sup> The typical sacrifice during Thesmophoria was a piglet, which in the Greek language is denoted by the word *choiros* which, at the same time, bears the meaning of vulva.

<sup>90</sup> Gimbutas 2001, 19.

according to this belief, regeneration could start only after the death process was completed and the condition for this was that all the flesh was eaten up.<sup>91</sup> Although we do not come across the Bird Goddess in Greek religion, its symbolism has been preserved in Greek tradition and folklore through the whole of antiquity, and up until the twenty-first century in the symbolism of the bird as a herald of death coming from the beyond. It is also possible to recognise the relationship between the bird and the Greek concept of death as a widespread metaphor that compares wailing over the dead with the bird song, as for example Sophocles' *Antigone* wails her dead brother:

kai; tou d j apallageto~ ejn cronw/ makrw/  
h/ pai~ oratai, kajakwkuei pikra~  
ofniqo~ ojkun fqoggon, ej oftan kenhi~  
eujh~ neosswin offanon bleyh/ leco~.

When, after a long while, this storm had passed,  
the girl was seen, and she wailed aloud  
with the sharp cry of a grieving bird, as when inside her  
empty nest she sees the bed stripped of its nestlings.<sup>92</sup>

The second shape of the goddess of death that Gimbutas recognises is the Stiff White Goddess who also covered the realm of death and regeneration, in terms of plants and humans. Images of this goddess, who often appears accompanied by birds or a snake, are characterised by an exaggerated pubic triangle and small breasts. Consequently, her main function is not nourishment, but the creation

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. However in the Greek classical period, the meaning of act of devouring changed, becoming associated with the most shameful way of death and that was dying without a grave, without being grieved and lamented. So in that context, excarnation by birds or dogs appeared actually as an obstacle to complete dying, which was to be achieved through adequate burial. Vernant 1992, 72.

<sup>92</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 423-426. Greek text and English translation by Sir Richard Jebb, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

of new life that appears after death and after burial in the womb of the Earth.<sup>93</sup>

But what happened to the Neolithic religious system after the Indo-European invasion and the appearance of the first Greek culture, Mycenaean? The position of Maria Gimbutas is that the invaders brought a warlike religion, full of male deities. However, as is usually the case when it comes to contact between conquering and conquered cultures, Mycenaean culture absorbed a lot from the Old European settlers. Thousands of figurines were found representing goddesses characteristic of Old European motifs, especially rich with the motifs of snakes – which indicated the importance of the snake goddess. Gimbutas regards the Mycenaean culture as transitional between the Old European, marked as a gynocentric culture, and the male-dominant Greek culture.<sup>94</sup> It is also essential to add that a lot of the tablets of the Mycenaean period already contain names of goddesses characteristic of the Greek classical period – Artemis, Demeter, Persephone, Hekate (or the local mythological figure – Baubo), that all appear as heiresses of the Great Goddess. On the one hand, they kept characteristics of the Old Goddess, thus preserving the Old Neolithic European concepts and attitudes towards life and death, and on the other hand, they went through the process of adaptation imposed by the religion of the Indo-European invaders, in which goddesses are sometimes raped or abducted (Persephone and Demeter), or sometimes appear as virgins – such as Artemis, who, in spite of this characteristic, became a protector of youth (both human and animal) living in the wilderness beyond civilised life. At the same time, this goddess used to receive human victims.<sup>95</sup> These cult

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 21. Numerous Cycladic figurines of the Stiff White Goddess from the period between 3220 and 2000 BC have been excavated from the graves of Cycladic Islands of the Aegean Sea.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>95</sup> The demand for human blood made by this goddess is witnessed to in the legend of Iphigenia, a virgin sacrificed to her. Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 20-21. Pausanias also mentions that the law-giver Lycurgus in Sparta replaced human victims sacrificed to this goddess by sprinkling the altar during the

goddesses (as well as the gods Dinyosos and Linos), mirror the remnants of the older religious system and the abandoned life and death concept.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the “split” of the Old Goddess into several separate divinities, with clearly defined and differentiated functions, points also to the separating and establishing of borders on another level. I think here, above all, about the perception of life and death. The borders between aspects of existence and non-existence that were blurred and actually did not exist earlier, gradually became fixed and defined.

Dividing life and death into separate concepts, but still concepts that cannot be disjoined, can be traced through the relationship between two goddesses, the mother and daughter, Demeter and Persephone (a grain maiden and a queen of the dead). In those two divinities Gimbutas recognises different aspects of the pregnant Neolithic vegetation goddess. Demeter, the divinity of grain, appears not exclusively as the fertility goddess, but also as Persephone, a “queen of the dead”. Pausanias informs us that when Poseidon raped Demeter, he transformed into a stallion.<sup>97</sup> This rape is interpreted by Maria Gimbutas as an Indo-European element that mirrors the aspiration of a new religious system to impose itself on the old one, and at the same time it symbolises the overpowering of

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flagellation of young men. Pausanias III, 16, 10-17. This goddess was very important in prenuptial activities – namely every virgin that was changing her status through the matrimonial act, had first to die for Artemis.

<sup>96</sup> Male deities such as Dionysos, Linos or Hermes are according to Gimbutas, successors of dying Neolithic god of vegetation. It is interesting to note that “Liondia” or “Linos’ dirge”, a song that lamented the premature death of Linos, was often recited at banquets and dances. *Iliad*, XVIII, 570.

<sup>97</sup> Demeter was in Arcadian Telphus called Erinye, because, she was angry (*erinein*) with Poseidon, who raped her. Trying to escape from him, she transformed into a mare, but he approached her in the form of a stallion. According to this legend, she gave birth to a daughter who is known under the name Potnia and, according to one version of the myth (Paus. VIII, 25), to the horse Arion. The other horse, Pegasus, is a son of Poseidon and Medusa, another mythical creature, the origin of which may be likewise related to a Neolithic Goddess. Pausanias, VIII, 25, 42.

Indo-European deities, or, as it is possible to interpret the myth about Demeter and Persephone, it epitomises the compromise between old and new gods, and female (Old European) and male (Indo-European) divinities. Certainly, the motif of rape in the myth about Demeter and Poseidon is easy to compare with Hades' abduction of Persephone. Besides this, there are numerous images of two goddesses on vases, where it is very difficult to make a distinction between the two of them, and that even appear under the common name Demetres.<sup>98</sup> All this stresses the oneness of their divine nature and the oneness of the perception of life and death.<sup>99</sup>

## 6) Conclusion

In the discussions that precede on the issue of fertility rituals, I started from the position of Margaret Alexiou and Gail Holst-Warhaft that these rituals appear as a kind of counterpart to funeral rites as opportunities for women to compensate for their restricted role in funerals that in the pre-classical period had been much more important.<sup>100</sup> The reason for this compensation lies in the

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<sup>98</sup> Gimbutas 2001, 161.

<sup>99</sup> This unity of two goddesses might be related to early Neolithic depictions of goddesses portrayed as Siamese twins dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> millennia BC and even with the Maltesean temples of the same symbolism. Dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennia BC (Ggnatija, Mnajdra and Tarixen) these twin-temples, with one usually bigger than the other, recall goddesses' wombs, and Gimbutas interprets these temples as the same as twin goddesses, recognising in half of the pair death, maturity, and winter and in the other – life, youth and spring. The western temples are usually larger and richer with religious artifacts, wherefore Gimbutas identifies these as related to death and regeneration, while smaller and eastward-oriented ones represent the rising sun and new life. *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>100</sup> Alexiou 2002, 21; Holst-Warhaft 1995, 117. The restriction of women's role was calculated and had to do with the restriction of women's influence on decisions about property inheritance. Due to the social changes that marked the development of city-states and the improvement of fathers' right and exclusively

power that women have always gained during the crisis provoked by death, i.e. women have always been those in charge of everything that was going on in the domain of the natural processes of life and death. The polis wanted to establish control over women during the critical period in which they could have disturbed its politics. The solution was to give women unrestrained freedom in women-only rituals. These festivals contained numerous ritual patterns that coincided with those of the funeral ritual – and women were authorised for the same religious duties that dealt with the forces of life and death. However, these festivals were repeated regularly and were performed according to strictly fixed ritual patterns. This regularity opposed the sudden crisis provoked by death, enabling much easier control. However, in spite of legislative regulations and other measurements, women's power and influence in funeral ritual was never completely controlled. This is a trace of the Old European religion when power was not ascribed only to the Goddess, but also to the women whose influence in society was strong due to their honoured role in religious life.

My intention in this chapter was to re-question why fertility festivals were chosen as the domain for this substitution of women's role in funeral rites, and what the intrinsic links between those rituals were. Agreeing with this position and emphasising women's lack of integration in public life, Vernant stressed that all festivals in which women had the leading roles, such as Thesmophoria, Anthesteria, the Eleusian mysteries or Adonyia, always had a part in which mourning for the god or the goddess was performed and that this mourning was directly connected with mourning for the dead.<sup>101</sup> It should not be forgotten that the Earth's fertility used to be related to women's fertility, so it is only to be expected that death of humans might have been correlated with the dying of nature. But, let me go back to laughter again. This detailed analysis of fertility rituals was

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male citizenship, women lost the vital role that they had had in religious and social life of *genos* in the archaic period.

<sup>101</sup> Vernant 1980, 100.

important not only to clarify the relationship between fertility and funeral rituals, but, first of all, to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of the life-giving laughter that appears in the context of rituals dedicated to the dying gods, in order to enlighten an important aspect of the ritual laughter that appears in the context of death. Furthermore, fertility ritual like funeral ritual, is celebrated both in vivacious and mourning atmospheres, since both rituals deal with concepts of life and death, so the laughter elements in both rituals are closely related.



## VIII

# From Cult to Culture and vice versa: Death and the Theatre – Greek Theatre in the Context of Cult and Culture

### 1) Introduction

While staying in the domain of ritual mockery and ribaldry, lasciviousness, exaggerated sexuality, and excessiveness – both male and female, and of ritual laughter in fertility rituals, I will now move further to the theme of the dying god, Dionysos, his cult and the first origins of the theatre. The aim of this chapter is threefold. First, I want to introduce some of the key concepts and arguments of the most influential and highly regarded approaches to antiquity today – those of Walter Burkert and one of the representatives of the French Anthropological School of Antiquity, Jean-Pierre Vernant. I am going to focus on their studies interpreting ancient theatre in the context of the Dionysos cult. Alongside the fore-mentioned theories, I would like to put forward the argument of a theoretician less well recognised world-wide beyond his own language area, Milan Budimir. Although belonging to a different, earlier generation, the ideas and work of Milan Budimir deserve to be presented alongside the most influential theories of today. The importance of this is basic because from the standpoint of the French Anthropological School – as well as the other humanities – science, unlike religion, searches not for the truth, but for knowledge. The frontiers of knowledge are broadening in all directions, not only through obtaining new knowledge, but also through preventing old knowledge being forgotten.<sup>1</sup> Following this quest, the second aim of this chapter is to save from oblivion the original and well-argued work of Milan Budimir concerning the origins of the European scene (as a technical

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<sup>1</sup> Slapšak 2000, 57.

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 specialisation enabled him to produce a detailed analysis of terminology related to the theatre and to the cult of Dionysos with all its complexities that are consequences of different times and local specificities both of the cult and of the theatre. Unlike most of the studies that deal with the archaic beginnings of the theatre, which are usually based on "hard" historical and archaeological evidence that is actually very fragmentary and leads to incomplete argumentation, Budimir introduces completely new arguments and approaches, which shed new light on the issue. From this follows the third aim of this chapter, 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 a few remarks on the methodological approach of the French Anthropological School that has been developed at the Centre Louis Gernet (EHESS) in Paris, not only because of Jean-Pierre Vernant, whose two studies on the theatre and the god Dionysus I am going to present, but mainly because of the methodological standpoints of the School's researchers that I accept and start from.

The anthropology of antiquity, as part of historical anthropology, represents a discipline that addresses an interface between anthropologically-informed history, historically-informed anthropology and the history of ethnographic and anthropological representations through the various disciplines devoted to the study of antiquity, such as archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, linguistics and philology. Each discipline exceeds its traditionally established framework, which being mutually overlapping, are 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) and using other ancient texts in the ancient context in order to avoid imposing contemporary values. This is achieved through the

constant re-examining of one's own position, as well as through the comparison of ancient Greece with other cultures. Anthropological fieldwork experience related to Greek or some other culture provides necessary support for a researcher's positioning when facing a particular historical and cultural context. Research, for example, into identity construction (of gender, citizenship, the Other) in ancient Greece demands similar research in the contemporary context.

The interdisciplinary approach to the anthropology of antiquity also deals with the beginning of European culture, re-examining and denying many prejudices and delusions that the conservative approach to the classics had established hand-in-hand with the European appropriation and colonisation of Greek antiquity. This calls for a re-examination of each of the inventions of antiquity by setting them in the original, antique perspective. From this arises further research into contemporary cultures and their reception in antiquity and the spreading of stereotypes related to them. In this context it becomes clear that the problem of the origin of the theatre completely exceeds the framework of traditional literary criticism, calling for the approach of the anthropology examination of antiquity, including both the religious and the political contexts in which that theatre appeared.

The main characteristic of the approach that the anthropology of the ancient world fosters, is the combining of different approaches and methodologies that do not exclude one another. One of the themes of the anthropology of Antiquity is the anthropology of theatre. Louis Gernet has 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, publishing their first collection of essays on Greek tragedy in the year 1972.<sup>2</sup> This book completely changed the direction of research on the topic, widening and combining methods of

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<sup>2</sup> Vernant 1993.

anthropology and classical philology.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter I will focus my attention on two studies by Vernant published in the second volume of the fore-mentioned book: *The God of Tragic Fiction* and *Features of the Mask in Ancient Greece*.<sup>4</sup> Vernant's reading of tragedy is based on its relationship with Greek democracy. He searches for the reflection of the meeting and tensions between two types of religiousness – an older, traditional one and one prescribed by the state.<sup>5</sup> His research focuses also on the theatre in its social context, emphasising that the classical Athenian theatre, unlike modern theatre, became one of the institutions of the Athenian polis, where all citizens gathered to watch and to reflect upon political issues, and were even paid to do this. Therefore, the audience consisted of the same people (the active participants in the democracy, which meant only men) that also gathered in the assembly and other polis' institutions. The specificity of the theatre as a public institution was that it was the only place where all those issues that could not be raised in the assembly were discussed and analysed. Tragedy was an

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<sup>3</sup> The exceptional collection of essays on Greek tragedy and comedy in the social context, which represents a work that started with Vernant and Naquet, particularly based on the extra-textual reading of these dramatic forms, was published in the year 1990 by Princeton University under the title *Nothing to do with Dionysos?* The title itself problematizes old Athenian proverb that was even in antiquity interpreted differently, referring in the first place to the growing complexity and innovation of dramatic performances, as if they were themselves distancing from the god Dionysos and the cult they belonged to. Theoreticians that contributed to 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.

<sup>4</sup> The 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.

<sup>5</sup> Vernant develops this standpoint in his study about Antigone and Kreont. Namely, Kreont tries to deprive Antigone of her right to bury her brother, but nevertheless, at the price of death, she does not want to give up in her right "given by the gods" to bury her brother.

ideal new medium, which marked and enabled the formation of the inner, responsible individual – as a political subject.<sup>6</sup>

Another theory that I would like to present is one of Walter Burkert. Probably the most eminent and widely recognised scholar of Greek religion nowadays, Burkert was originally influenced by the German school of thought, and he follows the ideas established by the Cambridge School of Anthropology and James Frazer.<sup>7</sup> Aware of the impossibility of separating Mediterranean, Near Eastern, and Euro-Asian elements from Greek and pre-Greek religion, and through using a multidisciplinary approach that often includes linguistics, Burkert combines minute research of religion with evolutionary and biological knowledge and with the most recent achievements of prehistory studies from sociological and psychological perspectives.

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<sup>6</sup> Vernan 1993, 11.

<sup>7</sup> The English School of Anthropology is also known under the name of the Cambridge Ritualists. Active in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these were all classicists who tried to step out from the blind alley in which researchers of Antiquity framed on an exclusively philological approach found themselves, and to include in their approach some anthropological aspects of the themes of antique religion. The 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 harmonise with, for that time, new and progressive concepts of evolution, their ideas about religion were based in the first place on the long-term development of the religious ideas that they researched together with the origins of literature. They were the first to apply the idea of the ritual basis of 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.

## 2) Tragōidia and the cult of Dionysos

Aware of the complexity of the origin<sup>8</sup> of theatre and its relation to the cult of Dionysos,<sup>9</sup> Burkert interprets the origin of theatre in relation to one of the most important institutions and practices in Greek religion and its rituality – the sacrificial ritual, and particularly the sacrifice of a goat characteristic for this cult. Burkert also re-examines the term *tragōidia*, refuting the widespread interpretation of 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 relationship to theatrical performance, interpreting *tragedy* as a “song at the sacrifice of a goat”.

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

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<sup>8</sup> The article “Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual” was published for the first time in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 7 in 1966. Later it appeared in the book *Wilder Ursprung* in the 1990. It was translated by Peter Being. Burkert 2001.

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

<sup>10</sup> About *Saturoi*=*Tragoi* see Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1935, 372, Lesky, 1964, 15ff; Pickard-Cambridge, 1927, 164.

However, in order to prove the truth of this standpoint, Burkert grounds his thesis in the study of sacrificial ritual in general, combining that with a critical reading of Wilamowitz through re-reading Aristotle, as well as the images of satyrs on vases. The starting position of Burkert is uncertain refutation of Aristotle's remark, according to which tragedy developed from a satyr play.<sup>11</sup> This position Burkert adopts from Brömer, who, on the grounds of the satyrs' images on the vases, asserts that the first representation of satyr-plays occurred after 520 BC. As this date is later than the first tragedy by Thespis, the conclusion is that the first satyr-play could only have appeared as a new invention, younger than tragedy.<sup>12</sup> Not convinced of such an idea, Burkert's argument remains unclear on the issue, offering compromise and the possibility of the existence of an earlier "proto-satyr-play", as Burkert terms it.<sup>13</sup>

The next argument that Burkert offers is far more clear and apposite for the subject. Namely, he turns to the widely known vase images of satyrs that, up to the Hellenistic period, although represented as theriomorphic creatures, actually do not have characteristics of goats, but of horses (tail, ears, hooves), wherefore it becomes difficult to connect satyrs with goats (*saturoi* with *tragoi*). Actually, there is a consensus on this issue among the three mentioned theoreticians mentioned – Burkert, Vernant and Budimir.<sup>14</sup>

In order to support his argument about tragedy as a song sung at the sacrifice of a goat, Burkert researched and confirmed that this type of sacrifice also happened in other Dionysus' cults.<sup>15</sup> In addition to that, he points out that at the centre of the Dionysiac orchestra there was an altar for sacrifice (*thumelê*) usually used for

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449a.

<sup>12</sup> Brömer 1937, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Burkert 2001, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Burkert 2001, 3; Budimir 1969, 100; Vernant, 1995, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Burkert 2001, 8.

the play, when the altar was required in the dramatic plot.<sup>16</sup> Burkert concludes that the altar (*thumelê*) cannot exist without sacrificing (*thuein*) and that the existence of the altar in the middle of the orchestra represents the memory of the sacrifice of the goat.<sup>17</sup>

In the article “La dieu de la fiction tragique” Vernant interprets the existence of the altar (*thumelê*) in the centre of the *orchestra* as the imitation of the one in Dionysos’ temple that he recognizes in the architecture of the theatre itself.<sup>18</sup> However, he refutes any possibility that *tragos* stands in relation to the tragedy, because there is 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 to some animal from the genus *Capra* is *aix*.<sup>19</sup> Considering these arguments, the standpoint of Burkert mentioned above seems indefensible.

At this point I would like to introduce the linguistic argument concerning the subject, developed by a Yugoslav scholar and specialist in Balkan linguistics in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Milan Budimir. In his article “The Origin of European Scene”, Budimir approaches this problem not only through research into ritual and the cult of Dionysos, but by offering philological arguments. Unlike Burkert, whose reference to the ritual context in which theatre has developed is more general and refers in the first place to the meaning and the origin of sacrifice in any ritual, Budimir analyses the cult of the god Dionysos with all its specific characteristics and particularities as well as the different hypostases and functions of this god, in order to clarify, as much as is possible, the ritual context in which theatre appeared. Beginning with the

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<sup>16</sup> The orchestra was a 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 *skênê*.

<sup>17</sup> Burkert 2001, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Vernant 1995, 29.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

archaic strata of the cult and the theatre, Budimir allows himself to move freely through diachrony (from Campanian *attelana*, to traditional puppet theatres and even to films) when that allows him to confirm the continuity of existence of certain phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> Starting from the original location of Dionysos' cult that in north-eastern Balkans (the area called Thracia), Budimir develops his analysis of terminology related to the theatre. Using his 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 (*skênê*, *orchêstra*, etc.). Many others, referring to the types of verses, chorus members, actors, such as *iambos*, *dithurabmos*, *Saturos* etc. are words that originally belonged to the Balkan pre-Greek settlers. This reflects the fact that the Athenian theatre developed from cultural contacts between ancient Balkan settlers and Greek invaders (the term is to be used with caution, since the dynamics of migrating and taking new territories is much more extended in time). Through linguistic research into terms related to theatre and the cult of Dionysos, Budimir sheds new light on the relationship between Dionysos and theatre, and also offers an explanation for the origin and the meaning of the word *tragôdoi*.

Budimir argues that term *tragôdia*, compared to *trugôdia* and *tragôdos* (these two terms were introduced by Aristophanes and adopted by peripatetics for denoting a dramatic form completely different from, and contrary to, tragedy) bears a very common alternation typical of Illyrian phonetics (*a/u*).<sup>21</sup> To these arguments, the author adds that in Sophocles' *Tracking Satyrs*, the satyr is called *Drakis*.<sup>22</sup> There is also a Latin word for a comedian of Illyrian origin

<sup>20</sup> Such diachronic approach was also approved by French school of anthropology of antiquity.

<sup>21</sup> The same alternation is recognisable in the variants of Dionysos name – *Bakhos/Bukhis*.

<sup>22</sup> Budimir emphasises that the same root *drak* is related to another Dionysos name, but also denotes cultic sticks that were used by Bacchantes during the Dionysian festivities. Bakhants would wave those sticks with their strong magical power, which had a gall on the top, the shape of which actually recalls a

– *draucus*, related to Gre. *Drakis*, *drakistês* – words denoting buffoon, comedian, actor. Thus, concludes Budimir, the relationship of satyrs (buffoons) with goats (*tragoi*) may only be a paraetymological adaptation of the word that denotes an actor.<sup>23</sup>

Turning his attention to the vase images of satyrs and their relation to Dionysos, as Burkert and Vernant also did, Budimir supports the hypothesis about satyrs as half-human, half-animal creatures with horse-like characteristics – tail, hooves and phallus. Budimir points out that an exaggeratedly large phallus is directly linked to comedy and the satyr play, through the laughter caused by obscenity, which is immanent for those forms.<sup>24</sup> In the wider context of the god Dionysos, Budimir points out that one of Dionysos' cult names on Peloponnesus (from where the oldest comedy moved to Attica) was *Phallên* and *Phallês*, and he relates it to another cultic name *Tauros*, also with the same meaning of phallus. But, before turning to laughter in the Dionysian cult, let us go back to horses in the wider context of other Dionysos' festivities, Apatouria<sup>25</sup> and Anthesteria, which are both devoted to the cult of the dead and hero cult. Namely, on the occasion of these Dionysian festivities, the souls of the dead are believed to appear among the living on wild horses.<sup>26</sup> Thus, concludes Budimir, Dionysian satyrs might only be

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phallus. Budimir confirms this association of the stick and phallus also by the Epicharmus Sicilians who, for denoting it, use the word stick – *therron*.

<sup>23</sup> Budimir 1969, 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Burkert 2001, 3; Budimir 1969, 101.

<sup>25</sup> The festival of Apatouria is devoted to young wine, and also to young Athenians who are becoming members of the cult community, called *fratria*.

<sup>26</sup> Budimir also finds a relationship between Dionysos and horses in the etymology that he offers for the name Dionysus, refuting the argument of P. Kretschmer according to whom Dionysos' name means *a child of Zeus: Dionusos*. Conversely, 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.

related to horses or horse riders (dead souls), while their large phalluses do not have any connection with the goats.<sup>27</sup>

Satyrs are thus related to the souls of the dead. The festival Anthesteria is the Ancient Greek All Souls Day, so the 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 the 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, desire, and erotic tension of any kind.<sup>28</sup> The world they are living in is turned upside down, non-regulated, imaginary and utopian, presenting the opposite of the citizen's ideals. The exaggerated obscenity of satyrs that arouses laughter is related to their carnivalesque way of expression. But what is its place in ritual? They provoke the laughter that, according to Budimir, represents an antidote to death and its demons.<sup>29</sup> It also represents the greatest manifestation of life and in the ritual context (as this one is) it always has a very strong religious motivation.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, there are two important aspects of cults that are important in enlightening the origin of theatre. On one hand, there are phallophoric processions and rites that are related to the general fertility domain, which both in the case of Dionysos and the case of Demeter (Eleusian Mysteries) were introduced to the Greeks from

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 102 Lissarague's detailed analysis of the representation of satyrs on vases emphasizes precisely the fact that satyrs always move in a group, never alone, which is exactly the case for dead souls and their visit to the world of the Living during All Souls Day. Lissarague 2000, 99.

<sup>28</sup> Beazley 1963-4, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Budimir 1969, 97.

<sup>30</sup> I have already written about ritual laughter in the context of sacrificial and funeral rituals in the chapter VI, 2.

old Balkan settlers.<sup>31</sup> Another cultic dimension that Budimir points out is that of 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 that of Vernant or Burkert. But let us see what Budimir’s arguments and conclusions are on this issue. Namely, to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy and comedy, according to which comedy is just “merry tragedy”, Budimir adds the short definition of Theophrastes, according to whom tragedy is about the hero and his suffering. But what else does Budimir reveal? Emphasising that hero is originally a cult 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 in tragedy and in comedy. He also analyses two Euripides dramas that sometimes more resemble 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 analysis, Budimir proves that the origin of tragedy lies in the satyr play, and in the cultic nature of the theatre that unites sorrow and laughter.

Taking into account all these arguments, Budimir turns to Aristotle’s position on comedy and tragedy. Such a broad approach allows Budimir to accept what Burkert hesitates over – that tragedy and comedy once had a common nature and common roots in the Dionysiac cult, and that one is serious and the other merry is due to the fact that tragedy started to be controlled by the city-state.<sup>32</sup> Budimir also refers to Socrates’ statement (in Plato’s *Symposium*)

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<sup>31</sup> Still Herodotus thought that Greeks received phallophoric processions from Pelasgoi, warns Budimir. 1969, 128.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 5.

that a good dramatic writer has to be proficient both when writing comedies and tragedies.<sup>33</sup>

At this point I would like to mention once more the concept that I have already discussed and that is “parodic” as understood by Olga Freidenberg. This concept corresponds in a way to Bakhtin’s carnivalesque and refers to the early worldview that inseparably embodied serious and non-serious aspects. While in early genres (such as satyr plays, mime, hilarotragedy) those aspects appear undivided, the turning point in which early cognitional concepts change, abandoning the pre-metaphoric stadium, is the appearance of comedy as a separate genre. This specificity of antiquity, especially of ancient Greece in which the old worldview is easily recognisable, disappears in the later epochs, argues Freidenberg. Undoubtedly, the archaic character of the early worldview that incarnates both the parodic and serious at the same time is, according to Freidenberg, recognisable in the figure of Herakles.<sup>34</sup> So, the position of Freidenberg confirms what Budimir argues – that tragedy and comedy appeared as the consequence of the former, religious worldview in which the serious and tragic merged with the parodic and comic.<sup>35</sup>

Another valuable contribution of this study by Milan Budimir is his argument on a very important aspect of dramatic plays that is still usually misinterpreted – *katharsis*. The main defect of theories about *katharsis* is that they do not take into account the fact that the origin of theatre lies in ritual, and that the *katharsis* that Aristotle mentions might be exclusively a ritual one, even though Aristotle himself did emphasise the ritual meaning of this concept. Budimir approaches this problem by using the text emendations, and the mistakes that often appear in these emendations. Thus, he namely suggests that the word *mathêmatôn* (that in the text follows *katharsis*) should be read as *miasmatôn*, since *thē* on papyri often

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<sup>33</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 223d.

<sup>34</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 332.

<sup>35</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 330.

stands for *s*.<sup>36</sup> In the light of this discovery that clarifies that *katharsis* or “purification” refers to “ritual impurity”, which is usually related to any (ritual) contact with the dead or death,<sup>37</sup> it is easy to conclude that the function of tragedy is ritual purification.

Budimir undoubtedly proves the ritual character of Greek theatre as well as that of its origin, and the nature of dramatic plays – comedies, tragedies and satyr plays (the latter two are always performed and written by the same dramatic poet in the combination with three tragedies and one satyr play), tends to confront the spectator with the forces of death and life, leading him, through release and purification, to life confirmation and celebration.<sup>38</sup>

Now, let us turn to the study of Vernant to see how he approaches the relationship between theatre and cults. Vernant’s methodology in this study is based on a reading of the visual, but also the text images of Dionysos’ mask. The first type involves reading archaeological data (masks of different dimensions that were not worn, but hung; painted images on the vases that depict masks on the pillars) and the other are textual descriptions in the first place in Euripides’ *Bacchantes* where Dionysian mania is presented. While reading a text in the anthropology of antiquity requires reading one text while 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 analysed in a defined context. Rejecting the popular aesthetic evaluation very often found in writing on antiquity, the structuralist approach demands that the condition for

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<sup>36</sup> Budimir 1969, 137.

<sup>37</sup> During three days of the Anthesteria festival called *miarai hēmerai* (impure days), that are devoted to dead ancestors and heroes (about whom tragedy speaks), the dead come to visit their living relatives. On ritual impurity, see chapter III, 5.

<sup>38</sup> The probable order of events on City Dionysia in classical Athens was as follows: first day: contest of ten boys in dithyrambos (one from each tribe) and contest of ten men’s dithyrambos (one from each tribe); on the second day it was a contest of five comedies; next three days: contest of three tragic ensembles (each with three tragedies and a satyr-play).

understanding a phenomenon involves starting from the position that each phenomenon is a part of a system and, that it mutually depends on all other parts of that system.

Dionysos in Euripides' *Bacchantes* appears masked. He is disguised in human shape, although this shape is ambiguous: man-woman, with 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 people – face to face. In some presentations, the big mask of Dionysos is surrounded by wild Menads and Satyrs.<sup>39</sup> Their unrestrained behaviour and the disappearance of the boundaries of social roles, gender and age, borders between human and animal (incarnated in satyrs), between human and divine, lead to the Dionysiac trance and acceptance of the divine mania. This reveals another important aspect of the god – Dionysian joy and liberating frenzy.<sup>40</sup> The technique of forgetting human destiny and erasing, at least for a moment, the knowledge of human mortality, is achieved through laughter. Here the standpoints of Budimir and Vernant meet: laughter in the cult of Dionysos appears as the strongest antidote for death, blurring the limits between the world of the dead and the world of the living.

Let us return now to the study of Burkert and how he connects the cult of Dionysos with theatre. He interprets the goat sacrifice in relation to Dionysos and tragedy through the theory of sacrificial ritual that “touches the roots of human existence”.<sup>41</sup> 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 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-human relations, was re-directed towards animals in the hunting phase of society. As I have already mentioned in the chapter devoted to Burkert's theory about *Homo necans*, it is

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<sup>39</sup> This is also obvious from the mentioned tragedy by Euripides.

<sup>40</sup> Vernant 1993, 44-50.

<sup>41</sup> Burkert 2001, 16.

the guilt of the hunter, who through the act of killing provides food and enables survival, that lies at the root of the experience of the sacred. So, the experience of death (i.e. killing) is intrinsically related to survival, while the sacrificial feast with obligatory joy are supposed to help in overcoming guilt and restoring normal life.<sup>42</sup> Burkert states that these experiences (of guilt and of sacredness) lead to the deep feeling of respect for life.<sup>43</sup>

And although Burkert evidently develops his theory starting with what he considers to be “inborn aggressive instincts”, he considers it not within the question of what “inventor” of some ritual had in mind when performing it, but questions rather what is the impact that ritual had on society, and what are the reasons for some rituals surviving. This functionalist approach and understanding that life affirmation is achieved and approved through sacrificial rituals, Burkert further expands through research into immanent connections between sacrifice and tragedy recognisable in the content of some tragedies, i.e. in the described sacrifices.<sup>44</sup> On the grounds of this theory Burkert concludes that tragedy is a form that developed from the ritual of sacrificing the goat, while *tragoidoi* are masked men taking part in a Dionysian ritual who originally collected in a troop to perform the sacrifice of a goat (*tragos*).

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<sup>42</sup> Burkert 1983, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Burkert 2001, 15.

<sup>44</sup> One of the illustrations of 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 *olougê* (sacrificial cry 1118). The way in which Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon resembles the ritual killing of a bull. She throws a net over him and kills him with an axe (*pelekus, bouplêx*). *Ibid*, 18.

### 3) Conclusion

I have presented three theories that deal with the relation of the theatre to the cult of Dionysos. Using linguistic arguments Budimir was the first to take the position later confirmed by Vernant and Burkert, that *tragôdia* is not the “song of goats”. Budimir refuted this paraetymological explanation by proving that *trag* in this compound stands for “buffoon, actor”. Analysing different aspects of Dionysos and his festivities, especially Apatouria (the festival of Athenian phratries – in which the clan system is closely related to the cult of the dead) he succeeded in going even deeper into the strata of language, and thus in elucidating the meaning of this word. Namely, he suggested that the supposed Indo-European form of this term would be *droughos*.<sup>45</sup> Adding to this argument that in Indo-European the diphthong *ou* also appears in Greek as *ō*, (e.g. the Greek word *trôzô* “mingle”), he indicated in his conclusion that *tragôidia* and *komôdia* bear the same meaning, signifying “the song of the community; choir song”.<sup>46</sup> This argumentation thus refutes the starting position of Burkert that *tragedy* is a “song at the sacrifice of a goat” (refuted also by Vernant), from which Burkert actually subsequently applies and inscribes his theory of sacrificial ritual.

Apart from agreeing that *tragoi* are not equal to *Saturoi*, the theories of Budimir and Burkert overlap in the conclusion that tragedy confronts people with the forces of life and death. However, unlike Budimir, Burkert takes into consideration tragedy as a form independent of 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 *tragôidia* meet each other.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Serbian word *drug*.

<sup>46</sup> Budimir 1969, 112.

<sup>47</sup> Burkert 2001, 18.

Although this reveals a relationship between Dionysos and the cult of the dead and heroes, Budimir reminds us what Burkert forgot: that the hero appears both in tragedy and comedy and as such appears with both aspects: the serious (tragic) as well as the comic. Thus, Burkert's argument about the relationship between hero cult and sacrifice in tragedy remains unconvincing.

Another weak point in Burkert's theorising, or rather the omission of a point in his consideration of the history of Athenian tragedy is this: it was only after the performance of Phrynichus's drama *Capture of Miletus* in 492 BC that a law was introduced to control the plots of tragedies, which from that time on, could only be based on the mythical core or events from the far past, but not recent events. Phrynichus' play was based on the tragic siege of Miletus by the Persians. Athenians felt such strong sympathy for the Ionians that experienced this horrible event, that their sorrow and reaction to the play influenced change in the whole tragic genre.<sup>48</sup> Vernant analyses the approach of tragedians to heroic myths by emphasising that unlike in epic poetry, in which the hero is praised, the dramatic hero has problems and he re-questions himself over and over again in front of the audience.<sup>49</sup>

And finally let us once more turn to the relationship between religion and theatre. What Budimir does in his study is to trace the path of the origin and development of the theatre in the framework of Dionysos's cult through a constant critical reading of the linguistic evidence related to the theatre and Dionysos, in the context of patient analysis of different aspects of this god. What Burkert does is to search for the relationship between sacrificial ritual and the origin of the theatre. He also searches for the relationship between the two in the embodiment of sacrificial ritual in tragedy, seeing the tragic play

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<sup>48</sup> "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)." Loraux 1998, xi.

<sup>49</sup> Vernant 1995, 26.

only as a form of sacrifice. Vernant, however, applies structural analysis through the reading of Dionysos' mask images both in the cult and in the theatre. The fact that Vernant does not deal with the origins of tragedy did not originate in his standpoint that the context from which it derives is not important, but because he himself does not find arguments for that.<sup>50</sup> The analysis of Dionysos's mask, which enabled the epiphany of the god, led Vernant to the problem of theatre and how the audience perceived the heroes of tragedies (with masks) – they were completely aware that those, though present at the stage, were at the same time absent, belonging to myths of the far past. Thus, theatre itself represents the embodiment of this Dionysian aspect of constant suspension of boundaries and the shift between reality and illusion.<sup>51</sup> The spectator is thus always aware that what he sees is fake, it is an illusion, it is imaginary. Precisely this is what makes tragedy so close to, and inseparable from Dionysos – he who is divine and is connected with the mixing of and transgression between this and another world.

The study of Budimir, in which he deals with the origin of the theatre, is of the three the most detailed and complete. Each argument of Budimir is grounded in considerable knowledge very patiently and subtly put into a concrete context. Reading his study now, at the present moment, opens the possibility of comparing it to more recent studies. Due to the fact that it was not accessible to a wider audience, the studies of Burkert and Vernant were written without knowledge of it. And although some standpoints and conclusions overlap, Budimir's study has made it possible to critically read Vernant and Burkert from a new perspective and to draw conclusions more easily. What is obvious is that the arguments of Budimir affirm the thesis and method developed by Vernant (and French Anthropological School of Antiquity), while they reveal the

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<sup>50</sup> 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 research that support this myth. Slapšak 2000, 38.

<sup>51</sup> Vernant 1995, 50.

weak points of Burkert's approach to this particular issue. The fact that I did not exhaust all potential arguments of this study of Budimir (and of course of his other studies) offers the possibility of further re-readings and re-interpretations of this brilliant scholar's work.

My intention here is to focus on theatre's origin and its development into one of the institutions of democratic Athens that drew directly on its ritual aspect. In particular, this involve regulations by the state, which affected the development of drama as a genre, and the fact that although drama was institutionalised, it did not succeed in depriving theatre completely of its freedom. So, even though it was controlled, theatre, as an institution of Athenian democracy, nonetheless represented a free space for re-examining important and otherwise non-debated questions.

For instance, the Dionysian festival, which used to be a merely carnivalesque festivity (i.e. a combination of mourning and joy) came to celebrate two worldviews – a parodic/hubristic and a serious one. The parodic/hubristic worldview typical of fertility rituals was institutionalised through comedy, being cultivated, appropriated, and thus made easier to control by the official structure. The theatre, as transformed carnival, appears once again in the domain of freedom, though in the form of shaped dramatic genres and under the strict eye of the state structures that were aware of the power of the art created and performed in the unofficial domain of the Dionysian festival.

The development of the theatre is thus an example of, and testimony to, how the creative and “regenerative” power of carnival and of laughter-giving culture in which the norms of everyday life are not valid, became one of the most important Athenian institutions, revealing, once again, how the polis manipulated and appropriated the domain of ritual in order to confirm its own control and power.

During the Great Dionysia, it was believed that communication with the Underworld was reinforced and that the shadows of the dead had free access to the world of the living.

Exactly facing such life-death forces and confronting the fear of death is what releases people from fear of any kind; everything becomes allowed, no conventions of everyday life are important or valid any more, and the space of freedom is widely open – in the carnival and the theatre alike – and precisely this gives the potential for new forms of expression in prescribed frameworks. The theatre as a new public space now becomes the domain of controlled voices that it is not possible to raise in everyday public life. These voices are often very fierce and critical, especially in the comedies of Aristophanes. Similarly, another form that has been censored and silenced by the Solonian law – women’s lamentation – finds its place in the one of the successors of women’s ritual freedom – at the Dionysos’ stage.

But let me now return to the thesis that Laurie O’Higgins postulated about women-only festivals – that such festivals as occasions of women’s autonomy, bear the potential for revolution. The perceived necessity to control these festivals, but also those in which both men and women participated such as Dionysia, that were characterised by the radical freedom and creativity that they brought, even after being partially transformed into forms such as theatre, reveals the actual threat that the system felt in relation to these religious occasions. It is obvious that the polis understood that it was impossible to completely push out these traditional forms, wherefore it made an effort to transform them, and (ab)use, reduce, confine and control their freedom and revolutionary potential.



# IX

## Historical semantics of the Terms for the Relationship between Laughter and Death

### 1) Laughing at the funeral

Upon the death of his wife, an intellectual was out shopping for a coffin and got into a big fight over the price. When the salesman swore that he couldn't sell it for less than fifty thousand, the intellectual said: "Since you're under an oath, here's the fifty thousand. But throw in for free a small casket, in case I need it for my son."

(Philogelos 97, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century AD)

When examining the different phases of the funeral ritual I have mentioned that the end of the lamentation on the grave and its replacement by the funeral feast was marked by a remarkable change in mood. Namely, as evidence reveals wailing and crying were followed by humour and laughter. However in order to understand this laughter, it is important not only to define the context and circumstances under which it appeared, but also to try to understand laughter as a phenomenon.

Even though the mentioning of death and laughter together usually provokes uneasiness and disapproval among people, which is also sometimes the reaction to the black humour jokes, I am going to start this discussion with something that is common to the two phenomena – death and laughter. These phenomena are very difficult to understand thoroughly and almost impossible to define precisely. However, I am going to begin with the introduction of three general theories about laughter.

First, modern theories about laughter as represented in the works of Hobbes dominated the philosophical tradition all the way up to the eighteenth century. This theory follows the standpoint that existed even in antiquity in the works of Plato (especially in *Philebus*) that laughter is always related to feelings of superiority. The second approach, which appears for the first time in the work of Herbert Spencer, is the relief theory, and it basically explains laughter as the release of pent-up energy. The most famous version of this theory is given by Sigmund Freud in his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* published for the first time in 1905. In it, Freud argues that “laughter arises if a quota of physical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so it can find free discharge.”<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the third is the theory of incongruity that can be traced to Francis Hutcheson in the eighteenth century and to Kant, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard. This theory interprets laughter as the (possible) consequence of unfulfilled or differently fulfilled expectations.<sup>2</sup> In 1900 Henri Bergson published a book on laughter in which he considers the last two theoretical directions, and also widens the perspective of the social contextualisation of laughter, interpreting it as the corrective punishment inflicted by society upon the unsociable individual. Concerning the aspect of the unexpected explosion of laughter, Bergson supposes that a necessary precondition for it is a certain rigidity of reactions and feelings.<sup>3</sup> At this point, I do not completely accept Bergson’s argumentation. Namely, the state of apathy does not allow any reaction, and such a state is not suitable for any kind of encounter that is necessary for laughing.

Let me turn now to the funeral ritual and the context in which this specific type of laughter appears. First of all, the mere fact that laughter is related to the rituals around the dead points to the

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<sup>1</sup> Freud 2001, 147.

<sup>2</sup> Propp 1984, 130.

<sup>3</sup> Bergson 1958, 83.

conclusion that this laughter is ritually conditioned, whereby we may define it exclusively as ritual laughter. The most common ritual context in which laughter appears is the one of fertility rituals that, due to the fact that they deal with issues of life and death and the forces of nature, are intrinsically related to the rituals around the dead. I have already mentioned that in Greek antiquity these rituals often appeared as a “compensation” ritual domain, allowed for the expression of all the behavior that was forbidden on the occasion of the funeral.<sup>4</sup> In that sense, it is possible to claim that laughter remained ritually acceptable only in fertility rituals.

I have already discussed thoroughly, in the chapters about fertility rituals, this type of life-giving laughter, which has the function to reinforce the powers of sexuality and fertility, reinforcing the regeneration of life. The obscene humour that provokes it might be understood as sympathetic – the naming of sexual organs and sexual acts often accompanied by extreme exaggeration, functions as a support for fertility and the life forces. The position of Vladimir Propp is that the religious motives of the life-regenerating function of laughter were very quickly forgotten among the practitioners, and that the reason why ritual laughter survived is the pleasure that practitioners regained by participating in, and enjoying, such feasts.<sup>5</sup> However, this position, which corresponds to the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, is a less developed argumentation comparing to the much more profound discussion of Bakhtin, who emphasised that the carnivalesque atmosphere in these festivals is a reflection of another world view. Ritual laughter appears in a spontaneous, noisy atmosphere, with no boundaries or limits. To this laughter, people devote themselves totally, under circumstances that would usually be regarded as inappropriate. This is the laughter of carnivals, the laughter of complete and absolute freedom, but also the laughter that accompanies the real and concrete satisfying of hunger and thirst.<sup>6</sup> It

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<sup>4</sup> Alexiou 2002, 21; Holst-Warhaft 1995, 117.

<sup>5</sup> Propp 1984, 150.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

is the world up-side-down, but it is also the world-view that is completely opposite to the everyday reality, the reality which is completely destroyed during the festival, in order then to be remade and revived. It is the laughter of the life that prevails and wins.

Although the analysis of Bakhtin is focused on theorising the carnivalesque as the manifestation of a different world view, Bakhtin actually does not go into the analysis of the genesis of such a worldview. The theoretical approach that offers a complementary perspective to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque is one by Olga Freidenberg, whose theory concerns the concept of hubristic/parodic. The concepts of Bakhtin and Freidenberg coincide, though the two theoreticians start from slightly different perspectives. While Bakhtin focuses on the functioning of carnivalesque semantics in the frame of Medieval culture, Freidenberg's interest is more directed at the research and understanding of cognition, which creates carnivalesque, through the early semantic of parodic. So, Bakhtin is focused more on the nature of carnivalesque, while Freidenberg makes an effort to map its origin in the folk and ritual tradition of Greek antiquity. She approaches the earliest forms of myth and literature, recognising in them a worldview different from ours, the one that enabled the emergence of carnivalesque.

But how does Olga Freidenberg interpret this concept? She argues that the domain of the comic in Antiquity represented a cognitive category, especially in the stages of pre-abstract and pre-metaphoric thinking. The twofold world(view) always embodied, at the same time, two aspects of the same phenomena, and one of those aspects always represents a parody of the other. I have already pointed out in the theoretical introduction, where I explained the starting position of Freidenberg regarding the functioning of early cognition, that this dual principle was not based on a binary view of the world, but that a totality was formed out of both, the inseparable "sides" mutually shifting, merging and constantly representing two sides of the same reality. In the same way, the Sun was always followed by its shadow, the sky by the Earth, "essence" by "illusion", and the complete universe was constituted out of two

opposed principles – the other principle always being hubristic, comic. This concept, which refers to the human cognition of pre-metaphoric thinking and in this period, the humour, the comic of hubris, did not have a function to deride. On the semantic level it represents an aspect, a potential for positive/negative perplexity, embodied in the mythic images of universe-construction and universe-deconstruction. Numerous mythic variants embody and transmit these two principles – peripeteia of the transition from pure animal to impure (death) and vice versa. The cathartic images, claims Freidenberg, are always exclusively dual – the merging of pure and impure. The best translation of the term hubristic is, as Freidenberg claims, parodic, but without our dimension of derision. Thus, antique parody represented a hubristic aspect, which distorted seriousness, without ridiculing it. These are the two sides of the sacred – the proper one and the other that is turned up-side-down.<sup>7</sup>

So, when the parodic/comic side definitely separated from the serious one and when the ideas about life and death became distinct, the parodic started to function independently, above all in the genre of comedy.<sup>8</sup> The meaning of the comic and laughter in the funeral ritual was forgotten, though ritual patterns did not easily change due to the taboo that encircles death. The function that was kept lay in exceeding the situation of pain and loss, recovering from the shock that confrontation with death provokes, removing death from everyday reality. The act of laughing at the funeral started to denote the first stage of returning to reality. The original meaning of such laughter disappeared (the inevitable shift from the serious to parodic), but its regenerative power remained.

The original meaning of ritual laughter is preserved in rich folklore material and myths. Apart from the mythical and ritual

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<sup>7</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 330-331.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that exactly the same kind of humor that is characteristic for fertility rituals appears in comedies. This also confirms the numerous parallels between Aristophanes and Rabelais that I have already mentioned.

paradigm around Demeter and Persephone, which was analysed in an earlier chapter, there is another context that might be illustrative and useful for clearing up the early semantic of life-giving, ritual laughter. It is the laughter that appears in the context of Hera's cult and the ritual of *Daidala*. According to the legend, Zeus and Hera had an dreadful fight and Hera decided to leave her husband. Thinking of how to make his wife come back, Zeus gave an order to cut a tree-trunk and clothe it in women's attire as his bride. Watching the scene of the fabricated wedding from a distance, jealous Hera came back, removed the veil from fake bride, and realising what was going on, started to laugh. Immediately after this event, Zeus and Hera were reconciled. However, jealous Hera decided to burn the fake bride – the tree-trunk. Similarly, the later ritual repeated the event from the myth. Instead of Hera, it was her priestess that removed the veil from the fake bride, and laughed afterwards. Eventually, this ritual ended with the burning of the wooden bride.<sup>9</sup> Accepting the thesis of Reinach, Veselin Čajkanović had a standpoint that, in this ritual context, Hera appears as a divinity of vegetation. The wooden idol is actually the embodiment of Hera, while the function of ritual burning is the reinforcement of regenerative powers.<sup>10</sup> The laughter of the priestess is ritual laughter – regenerative, life-giving, with the function of reviving the demon of vegetation; it is magic laughter, claims Čajkanović.<sup>11</sup> This interpretation that is based on the idea of magic laughter stands in close relation to concepts of “death”, “life” and “rebirth” as an undivided totality in archaic thought, and precisely this ritual and myth repeat this pattern.<sup>12</sup>

With the development of human cognition into abstract thinking through the formation of metaphors, came the division of

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<sup>9</sup> Pausanias, IX, 3, 3.

<sup>10</sup> I have already discussed burning as a life-restoring activity in the chapter about Olga Freidenberg's theoretical work.

<sup>11</sup> Čajkanović 1994, 1, 308.

<sup>12</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 56; 1997, 66.

life and death concepts as well as the division of tears and laughter. Laughter did not disappear from the context of funerals and All Souls Day, but its appearance on these occasions changed its semantic – it began to function as a protective mechanism against the powers of death and darkness. As the strongest manifestation of life, laughter at the same time appears as the most powerful antidote against the Underworld powers, and appears exactly in the final phase of the funeral rite, when communication with the Underworld is about to end. Hades was a place without laughter, the same as the rock on which Demeter was sitting lamenting for her daughter Persephone who had disappeared in the depths of Hades.<sup>13</sup> Tears and laughter do not appear at the same moment – neither in this myth about Demeter and Persephone, nor in the funeral rite. One precedes the other, while the end of lamentation is marked with life-giving laughter.

Let me turn for the moment to one important aspect of ritual laughter in fertility cults, and that is the character of the humour that provokes it. It has been already said that this laughter is obscene, unbridled, and offensive and in the Greek language it is defined by the noun *aischrologia* and verb *aischrologein*, meaning to speak shamelessly or insultingly. Exactly such a meaning of the word leads to an important issue for the understanding of cultic obscenities in the ancient Greek context, and that is attitudes to jokes with sexual or excremental connotation. That is, the basic idea related to such

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<sup>13</sup> The laughter is mentioned in Hades only once, namely, in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, when Diogenes sends a message to the cynic Mennipus, inviting him to come to the Underworld and truly laugh. Diogenes says that in the House of Hades one can laugh from the heart free from all the worries concerning death that usually affect living people. Apart from that, the Underworld is inhabited by many desperate millionaires, governors, and despots who cannot accept the fact that they lost the power they used to have in the earthly life and that the house of Hades is a place of egalitarianism, in which are all equal. This is another reason for laughing. Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead*, 107. This late cynic sermon does not only reveal humorous attitude towards death, but also questions and mocks the lifestyle of all those people who, regarding themselves as privileged in life, all become all equal in Hades.

words is shame and modesty, which means that these words, the same as what they describe, were unsuitable for public display.<sup>14</sup> However, obscene words were proper in the private context, and they did not bear in Greek antiquity, as they did in the case of Roman and later periods, any general connotation of dirtiness. Namely, since the Roman period certain sexual or scatological expressions have been considered unclean, but there was also a vocabulary for expressing the same things properly. Another important concept for the understanding of Greek cultic obscene humour is the differentiation between pornography and obscenity. And while pornography is introverted, provoking further sexual fantasies, the latter is extroverted, breaking from social taboos and escaping from fantasy. So Greek *aischrologia* were not in any way filthy words, but words surrounded by a certain taboo, related only to the cult or comedy. And exactly because of the association with the taboo, these words, when spoken, revealed a magical power.<sup>15</sup>

But let me, for the moment, focus on these cultic *aischrologia*. I have already mentioned women's ritual abuses through cursing and saying extreme obscenities in the various women's only festivals such as Tesmophoria, Haloa or Stenia. Furthermore, such shameful language is also characteristic for the cults of Dionysos, and in fact it happened that in the context of the cult of this divinity, elements of such humour developed later into Old Comedy.<sup>16</sup> The unbounded freedom was characteristic of the speech of those who were jesting while travelling in wagons (*ταρῆς ἀμαξῶν* *skwmata*) and mocking each other (*σκυπτεῖν*

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<sup>14</sup> Longines gives us a description, which is a good illustration of this attitude, stating that we would look different if our maker had wanted human's intimate parts to be visible, and he would not have hidden them, whereby our language has to be appropriate. Longinus 43.5.f. The same idea is expressed also by Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, 4, 6.

<sup>15</sup> For more about obscene language in Greek antiquity, especially in Attic comedy, see Hendersen, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> For more on this topic, see Herter 1947, Giangrande 1963 and Pickard-Cambridge 1968.

*ajlhlous*).<sup>17</sup> These wagons, carrying groups of jokers were common in Dionysian festivals, especially Anthesteria and the Lenaea, but probably in other festivals as well.<sup>18</sup> So the Dionysian stage was closely related to the other fertility rituals, while the type of humour and the mechanism of tabooed vocabulary functioned the same way – in the fertility rituals and in comedies.<sup>19</sup> Quoting Cratinus, Henderson argues that “taking advantage of freedom to satirize and ridicule – freedom deriving from the cults and supported by prevailing public sentiment – developed comedy into a great and powerful vehicle for the open treatment of public and social affairs of all kinds, as acceptable to the clever and sophisticated, as to ordinary citizen”.<sup>20</sup> Although relating comedy to its cultic origin and humour, Henderson does not consider the complete ritual context and consequently loses a certain perspective upon the interpretation of such ritual humour and laughter, which is inevitably related to tragedy, to a “serious” aspect, and to the All Souls festivals that belong to the Dionysian realm. This is the reason why Henderson does not recognise the apotropaic function of this laughter on the occasion when the souls of the dead were believed to visit the living. He also overlooks its relationship with tears, sorrow and mourning. Summarising the arguments of Olga Freidenberg, Mikhail Bakhtin and Milan Budimir that I considered in the previous chapters, I argue that ritual laughter is related to the dead, that it does bear a reinforcing and life-giving power and that it does gain another

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<sup>17</sup> Schol. Luc. JTr 44. See also Suda, Phot. s.v. *ταρῆξ ἀμαξῶν σκῆπτματα*, s.v. *πομπεῖα*-, *πομπεῦειν*.

<sup>18</sup> Henderson 1991, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Although the humour of Aristophanes’ comedies, for example, can be basically classified in the same category of grotesque, abusive, parodic, obscene and excremental humour, as in the cult, Aristophanes succeeded in reaching a very high level of sophistication, and also of embedding the humour into the plot itself. *Ibid*, XV.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

dimension – a protective one, through turning into apotropaic laughter.<sup>21</sup>

Third, a specific type of laughter is present in all sacrificial rituals, and it appears there as a condition for a successful sacrifice. Namely, all sacrificial victims were believed to be useless if not sacrificed in a good atmosphere. This aspect is important and it is possible to connect it with the funeral feast and the funeral ritual. So in order to carry out the funeral ritual properly and to successfully bid farewell to the deceased in the Underworld, the ritual of laughter was essential.

Interesting evidence of such a type of ritual laughter, the function of which is to provide a successful ritual, which is intertwined with other previously mentioned aspects of laughter at the funeral, is given by Novica Šaulić who researched funeral rituals and lamentation mostly in the area of Durmitor and other Dinar regions (Montenegro, Adriatic Coast and Herzegovina) in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Laments from these areas bear very similar characteristics to the ancient Greek ones. They are performed during the wake in the house, but also during the procession and at the grave, by mothers and sisters, while the sorrow and its expression through this poetic form had a powerful impact in the public domain, directly influencing a decision about future actions – either directing and calling for heroic behaviour and revenge, or mediating anger in order to achieve reconciliation.<sup>22</sup> It was never just one woman who lamented alone; the others gave her support. However, sometimes it happened that lamenters made a mistake. In such cases, all the others would burst into laughter. Afterwards, this event was often retold as

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<sup>21</sup> Traces of the life-giving laughter of the fertility rituals are recognisable even today in the 1<sup>st</sup> April jokes, coinciding with the period of the year in which fertility rituals were performed. Concerning the medieval, Christian Catholic context, this laughter is known as *risus paschalis* (Easter laughter), provoked by the funny stories of the priest.

<sup>22</sup> Šaulić 1929, X.

an anecdote.<sup>23</sup> If we interpret this laughter that appeared in the middle of a lamenting and wailing atmosphere in the context of the whole funeral as being ritual laughter, its function may be understood as corrective – repairing the mistakes and annullating everything that, in the strict behavioural structure of a funeral rite, went or could have gone wrong. However, this “corrective laughter” might be the same “magic laughter”, which keeps the vigour and strength of the dead in the Underworld, opposing the destructive powers of death and darkness. And since nothing in ritual is allowed to happen too spontaneously, this kind of humorous intervention and its mechanism that appears in the context of lamentation, is grounded in the deeper past, in the time when tears and laughter coexisted in the same realm of the merging and undivided life-death existence.

And although I hesitate to adopt any psychological perspective, first of all since I am not psychologist and, second, because I am aware of the absence of any absolute psychological categories in such a long historical span, which was warned by representatives of historical psychology, I am going to enter the psychological domain just for a while, but will basically stick to the ritual sphere. One of the main characteristics of laughter is that it is flexible and elastic and exactly these qualities make it appropriate and the only possible antidote to something so definite, inexorable, merciless and painful as death. It succeeds, at least for the moment, in challenging this unchangeable and irrefutable reality that participants in the ritual are confronted with. Laughter bears enormous subversive potential to overthrow the “thron” of dominance, not only by ridiculing it; it is also an important consolidating factor that increases power among those who laugh.<sup>24</sup> Its flexibility also makes it appropriate for marking the end of the mourning stages of ritual, and helping to prevent mourners from

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<sup>23</sup> Šaulić 1929, XVIII.

<sup>24</sup> Naranjo-Hubel 1995, 18.

drowning endlessly in the wailing mood and atmosphere.<sup>25</sup> Laughter bears a victorious force, to revoke, despise and distance death from those directly confronting it in the earlier phases of the ritual. It ridicules the power of death, it minimises sorrow and encourages the life forces to take over again. It is the triumph of life over death.

So, even though it is not spontaneous but ritual laughter, it appears in the final stages of the rite, accompanying the feeling of relief that all the previous stages have ended well. This does not mean that Greeks understood death as funny or humorous. The laughter in the context of death is on one hand, and following the argumentation of Olga Freidenberg, the relict of a forgotten worldview when life and death existed as an inseparable concept – without the dichotomies that we inscribe in it today. Due to the taboo that encircles death, it was difficult to change the ritual, even under the pressure of political laws, as we have seen in the example of lamentation, whereby laughter and black-humour jokes have been maintained even after the untying of the inseparable connection between tears and laughter that existed in funerals.

## **2) Ridiculed death and the dead: black humour**

### *a) Epitaphs and epigrams*

An important matter related to the ancient Greek concept of death is humour, which is most evidently embodied in the humorous epitaphs, or in other kinds of epigrams with the theme of death. This amalgam of death and laughter points to black humour, that treats things which are “grotesque, morbid or terrifying”.<sup>26</sup> My intention in this chapter and analysis of black humour is not only to represent the

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<sup>25</sup> The same position regarding laughter as a powerful antidote against any problem is the rhetorical advice of Gorgias, who claims that the seriousness of the opponent should be refuted by laughter, while laughter should be opposed by seriousness. Aristotele, *Rhetoric*, III, 18, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Pratt 1993, xix.

attitude to death (and of life) in antiquity, but also to refute the widespread opinion that black humour represents either an American invention of the late 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, or a European creation of the 1930s. In his study *Black Humor Fiction in the Sixties*, Max Schulz states that black humour appeared in America during the period of disillusionment and the decline of traditional values.<sup>27</sup> Defining it also as an American type of humour, Conrad Knickerbocker characterises it as “terrible” and “marvellous” at the same time.<sup>28</sup> In this context and as a modern phenomenon, theoreticians describe black humour as the culmination of literary modernism, or as the beginning of post-modernism. Another stream of thought suggests that the origin of black humour can be found in the European tradition of French surrealism: namely, it was André Breton who coined the phrase *humor noir* in the 1930s. He characterised it as rebellious, iconoclastic and aimed at questioning social norms. But, as I am going to argue, despite of the innovation of the idiom *black humour*, the tradition of black humour is not a unique innovation of the “sophisticated” literature or film art produced in Europe or America during the twentieth century. It equally belongs to antiquity, not only to comedigraphers and writers such as Aristophanes on the Greek side, or Juvenal and Petronius in Rome, but also to the domain of folk tradition and ritual. I have already argued for the close and innate connection between the genres of comedy and rituality. My claim that black humour had to be ritually justified, or at least allowed, is supported by the fact that the taboo around death is so strong (and this is the reason why this ritual has changed very little since the remote past up to the twentieth century, despite forceful and persistent interventions by the state and Church), that it would ban any behaviour that is not ritually required or at least accepted. One can make the point that, in the eyes of the Greeks, humour in the context of death was a good way to confront the latter – mocking the absurdness that people faced in the moment of someone’s death, or using the opportunity to mock and

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<sup>27</sup> Schulz 1981, 271-272.

<sup>28</sup> Knickerbocker 1964, sec. 7, 3.

ridicule institutions, values or some person in the context of extreme absurdness.

As examples, I have chosen several ancient Greek epitaphs and epigrams of different dates – from the sixth century BC until the first century AD. The humour of these epitaphs is mostly recognised as grotesque, ironic and sarcastic.<sup>29</sup> Although it is related to the dead and death, the humour often reveals very strong social and political involvement. The following example is the earliest evidence that I am going to quote, and belongs to the period between the second half of the sixth, and the first half of the fifth, century BC:

1. **polla; piwn kai; pallā; fagwn kai; polla; kaj  
j eiþwn  
ajqrwpou keimai Timokewn Rodi~.**

Having drunk many things and eaten many things  
and spoken many slanders about people,  
I lie here, Timocreon of Rhodes.<sup>30</sup>

This epitaph written by Simonides about Timocreon is written in elegiac metre and starts with the weaknesses of Timocreon, treating them as if they were some military or athletic virtues. In this way, Simonides mocks his former friend. But, is this the only possible interpretation of this humorous epitaph? If we recall the fore-mentioned semantic analysis of tombstone inscriptions by Jasper Svenbro, every time a passerby reads an inscription on a funeral monument, he/she invokes the dead, “emanating” *kleos*, the ideal that each mortal should strive to reach.<sup>31</sup> His theory emphasises that epitaphs and reading them aloud makes possible the revival of

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<sup>29</sup> Black humour also appears in philosophical literature. In Plato’s *Phaedon*, Socrates ridicules philosophers who are trying to understand death and the secrets of dying all their lives. Simmias’ response is that, therefore, philosophers are those who deserve to die. Plato, *Phaedo* 64a-b.

<sup>30</sup> *Greek Anthology* 7.348, Atheneus, *Deipnosophists* 10.415, *Simonides* 37 in Page’s 1981, EG 167.

<sup>31</sup> Svenbro 1993, 13.

the dead person's *kleos* among the living. Therefore, this epitaph is ironic and ridicules not only the dead who did not achieve these virtues, but at the same time it either questions the concept of *kleos* and the qualities that are necessary for it, comparing them to the faults, or it criticises the character and behaviour of people who are publicly recognised. The absurdity is intensified by the context of black humour and the unbreakable tie of life and death. Showing even greater irony towards the prevailing heroic ideals, the dominant military discourse and the real attitude of the state, i.e. of its commander, towards its fallen soldiers, is the following example of an epitaph by Alcaeus of Messene on Philip V:

2. **AKlautoi kai; aq̄aptoi, odoipore, twd j epi;  
nwtw/**

**Oessaliā- trissai; keimeqa muriades,  
Hmaqih/ mega phma: to; de; qrasu; keino  
Filippou  
pneuma qown ep̄fwn w̄bet j e]afoteron.**

Philip on Alcaeus of Messene:

**Aflioio- kai; alfullo-, odoipore, twd j epi;  
nwtw/  
Alkaiou stauro- phgnutai h]ibato-.**

Alcaeus:

Unwept and unburied, o traveler,  
we thirty thousand lie on this ridge of Thessaly, a  
great sorrow to Macedonia;  
but that bold spirit of Philip has departed,  
nimblar than the swift deer.

Philip:

Barkless and leafless, o traveler,  
a tall stake is fixed in this back of Alceus.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Greek Anthology* 7. 247, See also Plutarch, *Flaminius*.

Apart from the real epitaphs with an invective character, we also come across pseudo-epitaphs. This one is dated to the Hellenistic period. Again, as in the former one, it obeys the customary pattern of epitaphs devoted to fallen soldiers, properly corresponding to the required “serious” paradigm. Actually, the expected form is distorted and infused with irony: the soldiers do not lie buried, but unburied, they are not wept but unwept, they are not a source of proud, but a sorrow to Macedonia. The target of the invective is their commander, King Philip V, who roughly replies to Alcaeus that a stake, similarly to some neglected funeral monument, is fixed into Alcaeus’ back. The appearing of the body points to the corporeal dimension of the humour characteristic for ritual laughter. Further on, it is claimed that this “monument” is so insignificant that it even stays “barkless and leafless”. And while the first part of the epigram is based on irony, the consequent response is characterised by a combination of sarcastic, morbid and grotesque images of Philip’s opponent.

The following epigram focuses on the absurdity of life and people’s endless effort to confront the disease or postpone the death:

3. **Tou Iiqinou Dio; epcq;- ol Ikiniko; h̄yato**  
**Marko-:**  
**kai; liqo; wh̄ kai; Zeu;, shmeron e;feretai.**

Yesterday Doctor Marcus touched a stone Zeus.  
Though stone and Zeus, he has his funeral today.<sup>33</sup>

This epigram from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD should be understood in relation to the praxis of ancient medicine and the attitude towards healing, closely related to the ritual praxis. This meant that, apart from the doctor’s treatment, it was necessary for the patient to touch the stone statue of the god and to pray for health. The pun in this epigram is that touching of the hands of patients by doctors was part of the act of treatment, in which doctors used to check the pulse of the ill person. Black humour in this epigram is created through the

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<sup>33</sup> *Greek Antology* 11. 113 by Nicarchus.

sense of irony and fatalism and inevitability of death that are considered to be the main characteristics of this kind of humour.

Next is the epitaph of Hippon that belongs to the standard collection of the surviving record of verbal fragment of the work by Hipponos of Samos dated in the Hellenistic period.<sup>34</sup>

4. **ἵππο- τὸδε σῆμα, τοῦ ἀθανάτοισι ἴσους  
ἴσον ἐποίησε Μοῖρα καταφίμενον.**

a) This is tomb of Hippon, whom, when he died,  
Fate made equal to the immortal gods.

b) This is tomb of Hippon, whom Fate made just as  
dead as the immortal gods.<sup>35</sup>

The Greek epigram includes a word-pun of two accusatives in line two. I offer a double translation of it in order to show how the pun functions. Namely, in the first translation *ἴσον* means that “equal” functions as a predicative, while *καταφίμενον*, with the meaning of “having died”, figures as a circumstantial participle and the first translation is thus more literal. The second translation reveals the secondary meaning of *ἴσον* – “equally” as an adverb, and of *καταφίμενον* “dead” as the predicate.<sup>36</sup> Again, the black humour in this epitaph is based on the combination of irony and fatalism. The absurdity is that death makes mortals closer to the gods, but this may also be understood as a life being glorified and highly prized.

**b) Byzantine Continuities – Philogelos**

Apart from the humorous epitaphs, the special category of black humour epigrams can also be found in the collection of *Philogelos (The Laughter Lover)* consisting of some 265 jokes dated

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<sup>34</sup> The general opinion is that this epigram is only spuriously ascribed to Hippon.

<sup>35</sup> Hippon 1.

<sup>36</sup> Page 1981, 57.

to the early Byzantine period of the fourth or fifth century AD. Sometimes these manuscripts offer the names of the compilers (Hierocles and Philagrius), sometimes they exclude them.<sup>37</sup> Focusing on this material, I am going to analyse several types of jokes with a black humorous content. This sub-literary genre offers an interesting perspective for establishing some cultural insights into everyday reality, folklore and attitudes during antiquity. Moreover, like the black-humorous epitaphs, jokes often represent a form of rebellion with a subversive intent aimed at the prevailing ideas or habits. The strength of this humour lies exactly in the pleasure that it adds to socialising. Jokes from the collection are grouped thematically, and each joke usually appears in several variants.

5. **Mequsw/ eñ kaphelaiw/ pinonti epista- ti-  
elfh: hl gunh; sou apeqanen. ol de; akousa-  
pro- tou kaphel on elfh: oukoun, auqenta, ek  
tou melanou kerason.**

While a drunkard was imbibing in a tavern, someone approached and told him: “Your wife is dead.” Taking this in, he said to the bartender: “Time, sir, to mix a drink up from your dark stuff.”<sup>38</sup>

This joke with its misogynist connotation belongs to the large group of jokes about a man happy about the death of his wife. Alongside other similar paradigms, this confirms once more that drinking alcohol was an integral part of each funeral ritual. Of course, the strict ritual rules allowed for drinking exclusively in the frame of the ritual, not permitting any drinking in public, or drinking

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<sup>37</sup> Though it is likely that this collection of jokes already existed during the Hellenistic period, the document from the Byzantine era is the earliest one that is preserved. Athenaeus informs us that Philip the Great had paid for a social club in Athens to write down its members' witticisms. (614d-e) On the Roman side (at the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) we have references in Plautus' comedies to joke-books. Plautus, *Persa* 392; *Stichus* 400.

<sup>38</sup> Philogelos, 227A.

in a tavern. The other example of this joke, which appears in numerous variants, puts emphasis on the egocentrism and happiness of the misogynist who lost his wife:

6. Misogunaiō~, th~ gunakio~ auitou  
 apoqanoush~, epi; twi qayai ekhdeue. tino~  
 de; eirwthsanto~; ti~ apenausato ; efh: egw; ol  
 tauth~ sterhqeiv.

A misogynist paid his last respects at the tomb of his dead wife. When someone asked him, “Who has gone to rest?” he replied: “Me, now that I’m alone.”<sup>39</sup>

This joke is a very clear example of the way in which tension between the content and the expectation arises, and exactly this kind of incongruence has the capacity to transform fear and pity into cathartic laughter.<sup>40</sup> Those jokes that ridicule for instance astrologers, prophets, or star-gazers, or those who give a false prophecy about someone already dead – either a parent or a child of the person in question – are of the same type.

7. Afuei mantei proselqwn ti~ ek apodhmia~  
 ajiwn hwrta peri; twv oikeywn. ol de; eipen:  
 ugiaiōusi pantes, kai; ol pathr mou dekatōn  
 etō~ epei ajf j ouj apeqanen ~ apekrinato:  
 oujden gar oida~ ton kata; ajhqeian sou  
 patera.

On returning from a trip, someone asked a charlatan prophet how his family was. “They are all well, especially your father.” “But my father’s been dead for ten years!” “Ah, clearly you do not know your real father.”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 247A.

<sup>40</sup> Freud 2001, 147.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

Another group of black humorous jokes from Philogelos are those about *scholastikoi*. The word is usually translated as “intellectual”, or “professor”. Though neither of those translations is precise, the word actually refers to the self-centred educated person, so deeply preoccupied with his own interests and ambitions, that he loses every contact with reality.

8. Scolastikoꝛ apoqanontoꝛ sumfoithtou  
epeskepteto touꝛ goneaꝛ. tou de; patroꝛ  
aujtuꝛ oꝓluomenou kai; legontoꝛ: teknon,  
ejtalaipwrhsaꝛ me. thꝛ de; mh troꝛ legoushꝛ:  
teknon, ejtufalwsaꝛ me, ol scolastikoꝛ proꝛ  
touꝛ ektairouꝛ eipen: eij tauta aujtw/  
pepraktai, erchn aujton kai; zwntak  
kauqhnaı.

An intellectual checked in on the parents of a dead classmate. The father was wailing: “O son, you have left me a cripple!” The mother was crying: “O son, you have taken the light from my eyes!” Later, the intellectual suggested to his friends: “If he were guilty of all that, he should have been cremated while still alive”.<sup>42</sup>

Another interesting level embodied in this joke is that the grieving of parents resembles a ritual lamentation. The absurd humour of this joke and the ridiculing of the stupidity of people who are particularly proud of their intellect, intensifies the absurdity of everyday problems that preoccupy people, in relation to the shortness of life and its termination.

I am going to end this review of the black humorous selection from *Philogelos* with the joke from the series about the inhabitants of Kyme, who in the Greek world were often a target of jokes:

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

9. **Ἐν** **Κυμῆ** **ἐπιθμῶ** **τίκω**· **κθδευομένου** **προσελθῶν** **τί**· **ἤρῳτα** **τοῦ**· **οἰκίκευοντα**·· **τί**· **ἤρῳτα** **τοῦ**· **οἰκίκευοντα**·· **τί**· **ὁ** **τεχνῆκω**·**ἔ** **εἶ**· **δε**· **Κυμαίο**· **στραφεῖ**· **ὑπεδείνω** **λεγῶν**· **εἰκεῖνο**· **ὁ** **ἐπι**· **θ**· **κλίνῃ**· **ἀπᾶκεῖμένο**·.

When a distinguished man was buried in Kyme, someone came up and asked the mourners: “Who was the dead man?” One of Kymeans turned around and pointed and said: “That guy lying on the bier.”<sup>43</sup>

The plot is woven around the dead, while the mechanism of the joke that asks a question and gives an answer that is obvious, but not a real response, is recognisable also today. This is the same type of joke as, for example, “Do you know what time it is?” with the jesting answer “Yes, I do.” The only difference is that the absurd (black-humorous) context of the ancient example makes it even more radical and therefore funnier.

Most of the quoted black humorous jokes concern and react to social realities. This aspect of black humour reveals its close relation to real life, shifting realism into extreme metaphysical truth. What this means is that the fact that it mentions and confronts the end of life, gives to black humour the power to oppose anything and anyone. “Committed only to detachment, Black Humour can never be betrayed or duped or ever be wrong.”<sup>44</sup> That makes joking an extremely serious matter, enabling people to face and win, at least for the moment, any kind of power, and to overcome the feeling of helplessness in face of social injustice, to laugh at the petty cheats and those who buy their services (no. 7) and win power over the politicians and army commanders (no. 2). It enables opposing, and making obvious, human weaknesses (no. 1), vanity (no. 8) and greed. The joke, especially the black humorous one, invalidates the power

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Feldman 1993, 106.

of all existential obstacles and of death itself, reducing everything to the absurdness of life. And, it is exactly this absurdity which provokes life-giving laughter, the only antidote for death.

### 3) To die of laughter

The painter Zeuxus died of laughing, when he painted funny old women.

(Festus, s.v. *pictor*)<sup>45</sup>

I have started this section with a quotation by the Roman grammarian who commented upon the very intense laughter of the Greek painter (5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> ct. BC). This fragment is extremely interesting with regard to the fact that the same antonymous words *risu mortuus* – “to die of laughing” – appear as an idiom in many modern languages. Following the position of cognitive linguistics that approaches phraseology with the idea of the concept around which different idioms are grouped, I am going to analyse the class of idioms in Modern Greek and Serbo-Croatian grouped around the concept of “dying”.<sup>46</sup> In the phraseology of these languages, the idioms that relate “death” and “laughter” are represented in the following scheme: verb + noun: Greek *peqainw sta gelia* and Serbo-Croatian *umreti/ umirati od smeha*. Therefore, I am going to focus also on other idioms in which the concept of death is represented by the verb (to die), while the second part of the idiom is a noun.

When we compare Greek and Serbo-Croatian, it is possible to find remarkable parallels around the verb “to die” (*peqainw*, *umreti/ umirati*). Apart from dying of laughter, the idioms in these languages reveal that it is also possible “to die” of boredom, hunger

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<sup>45</sup> *Pictor Zeuxis risu mortuus, dum ridet effuse pictam a se anum.* Festus, 228 M s.v. *pictor*.

<sup>46</sup> Mpampaniotis 2002, Matešić 1982.

and thirst, passion and fear: Greek *peqainw thx peina-/thx diya-* – “to die of hunger” / “thirst”, *peqainw apov plhkh/ania* – “to die of boredom”, *peqainw apov ton fobo* – “to die of fear”, *peqainw apov epiqumia/ poqo/erwta* – “to die of desire, longing, passion”. The situation is quite similar in Serbo-Croatian: *umirati od gladi/žeđi* – “to die of hunger / thirst”, *umirati od dosade* – “to die of boredom”, *umirati od straha* – “to die of fear”. In the dictionary of idioms in Croatian or Serbian language by Josip Matešić,<sup>47</sup> we do not come across the idiom *umirati od čežnje* or *umirati za nekim* – longing for somebody, which does exist in the language. On the other hand, in the Greek language we do not come across the idiom of “dying of shame or embarrassment” that does exist in Serbo-Croatian – *umirati od stida/sramote*. As is obvious from the examples above, the verb “to die” went through the process of desemantisation, creating the meaning of strongly emphasised action. It is possible to claim that the verb “to die” functions in such a way that it gives relative meaning, emphasising the intensity of the action applied to the noun that succeeds it.

But let me return to the idiom that I started with – “to die of laughter”. In the previous chapters I have already explained ritual contexts, the relation of death to laughter and the possible interpretation of the meaning of this relationship. What interests me now is whether it is possible to claim that the idiom “to die of laughter” has any connection with the early concepts of life, death and rebirth preserved above all in the ritual context of fertility rituals, but also in funeral rituals. Furthermore, is the idiom in any way related to Bakhtin’s and Freidenberg’s concepts of life-giving laughter? Regarding this, it is significant that all of the fore-mentioned idioms except for one, embody concepts that are characteristic of carnivals either directly in participants’ behaviour or to the contrary, through overcoming and satisfying some need: laughter, shame and shamelessness (exaggerated lust), and hunger, i.e. the abundance of food and drink, and finally fear and the

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

overcoming of fear during the period of carnival.<sup>48</sup> So, although “dying” is desemanticised in the group of phrases that I have analysed, we should not exclude the possibility that the group of idioms does embody the early concepts of death that brings rebirth – through life-giving laughter, through the passion and sexual forces embodied either in language or in unbridled behaviour, and finally through the act of eating that explicitly maintains our lives.

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<sup>48</sup> Only “dying of boredom” does not stand in such a direct relationship to the carnivalesque behaviour, but we should not reject this idea completely. Namely, we cannot imagine a boring carnival, or alternatively, boredom in life is a sign of the inability to feel life happiness – boredom does not exist when people are preoccupied with great pain, fears, or hard difficulties.

# X

## Conclusion

### 1) Christian sources for death in the Balkans

I started the previous chapter with a quotation from the *Philogelos*, a black humour joke from the early Byzantine era that undoubtedly shows continuity with the ancient laughing attitude towards death. Where funeral rituals were concerned, the transition from paganism to Christianity during the Byzantine period happened very gradually. During the first two centuries of the new Empire, official Christian policy towards paganism was tolerant and considerate, absorbing numerous pagan elements. There were many pagan cult sites that were transformed into Christian shrines.<sup>1</sup> During the fourth and fifth centuries AD it is possible to detect the transformation of religious tradition and practice in the cities, while the situation in the countryside varied, showing greater persistence of the survival of the pagan traditions.<sup>2</sup> A plentiful amount of Christian evidence (e.g., homilies, chronicles and commentaries) demonstrates the survival of the pagan funeral ritual, usually mentioning it with disapproval.

The funeral ritual started as soon as the violence of grief and mourning had passed. As in antiquity, first came the closing of the eyes and mouth of the corpse, still called by the ancient term *kalyptein*.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes a coin was placed on the mouth. This was preceded by washing the body and anointing it with wine, oils and scents.<sup>4</sup> After this, the corpse was dressed in a white winding-sheet

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<sup>1</sup> Malalas, Migne 97.344, 324. Brown 1971, 54-56.

<sup>2</sup> This is shown in various sources from the seventh to the twelfth centuries. See Brown 1971, 50-57, 72. Gregorovius 1889, 1.35.

<sup>3</sup> Rush 1941, 105-10.

<sup>4</sup> Alexiou 2002, 27.

*sabanon* that corresponds to the Homeric *pharos*. The cloth had to be used for the first time on that occasion. It was often decorated with gold and purple. The corpse was then placed in a bier and covered with the same herbs as in antiquity: laurel, palm, olive, myrtle, cypress and celery.<sup>5</sup> The bier was aligned towards the east.<sup>6</sup> When this preparation was over, the wake could start, as well as the ritual breaking of vessels, which was meant to chase away evil spirits. The cutting and tearing of hair is mentioned in the epic verses about the legendary hero Digenis Akritas, who, while lying on his deathbed, asks his wife to cover him with her hair.<sup>7</sup> According to the evidence, and especially the comments of numerous Christian writers, violent outbursts of grief and mourning were still customary. The frequency of these malicious comments and condemnations is proof of the resistance of the pagan ritual.<sup>8</sup> The fiercest of all in his criticism of pagan ritual is John Chrysostom. In one of his comments he says that the dirges are “blasphemies”. It is not only that he criticises the ritual practice of those who do not obey the Christian ritual, but persist in the rituals of laceration of the skin, the tearing of hair, rending of garments, and mourning; he also criticises the ritual introduced by the Church and the way in which the Church adopted it.<sup>9</sup> Namely, at the large funerals of important people, it was customary to hire many people to sing psalms and funeral hymns.<sup>10</sup> It happened that the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Migne 60.725.

<sup>7</sup> The manuscript from Andros, seventh century. Digenis Akritas 4481-2 (A).

<sup>8</sup> Examples of such malevolent comments can be found in the homily of Basil of Caesarea (IV c.) Migne 31.229c. For examples advising people to act moderately in their grief, see Gregory of Nyssa, homily *de Mortuis*.

<sup>9</sup> The Christian church was still unified at that time. Namely, the separation into Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church happened in 1054, six centuries after the mentioned period. Ostrogorski 1993, 318.

<sup>10</sup> According to Justinian, the great Byzantine emperor and legislator, Anastasios limited the number of hired participants at the funeral at 100. Rush 203- 208. The bier was sometimes carried by horse cart. Migne 49.52.

Church finally did gain control, but the funeral was, according to John Crhysostom, too similar to the pagan ritual:

Tiv poiei~, w\ gunaiĕ gumnoi~ seauthn ajšchmonw~, eipev moi, epi; mesh~ th~ agora~, tou Cristou melo~ ousa. ajdrwn parontwn kata; thn ajoranĕ kai; trica~ tillei~, kai; diascezei~ ejsqhta, mega kwkuei~, kai; coronoi periista~, kai; mainadwn gunaikwn eikon diaswzei~, kai; ouc; hgh/ tw/ Qew/ proskroueinĕ.

What are you doing, women? Tell me, would you shamelessly strip yourself naked in the middle of the marketplace, you who are a part of Christ, in the presence of men and in the very market-place? And would you tear your hair, rend your garments and wail loudly, dancing and preserving the image of Bacchic women, without regard for your offence to God? <sup>11</sup>

He mentions that funeral processions were led by a rabble with much loud noise and bright torches. John Chrysostom also writes about women dancing in the procession. When approaching the most public of places – the market – women used to stop for a long and well-organised performance.<sup>12</sup> In another fragment he attacks loud, luxurious funerals with their expressions of excessive grief, but also the playfulness and fun, advising that such behaviour should be replaced with dignified quiet grieving:

<sup>11</sup> Migne 59.346. All translations in this chapter are mine.

<sup>12</sup> Fragments that mention unbridled funeral processions in *Patrologiae Graecae* are the following: 63.811, 809, 807; 62.203; 61.697, 702, 707, 48. 1020. See also, Alexiou 2002, 29-30. There are evidences of dancing in the graveyard during the Middle Ages elsewhere in Europe. For instance, the Church Council of Ruan forbade dancing on the graveyard and in the Church, while in 1405 dancing in the graveyard was banned, as were playing and games there, and the presence of mummers, musicians and jugglers. Ariès 1989, 35. cf. V. Dufour, *Paris à travers les ages*, Paris, Laporte, 1875-1882, vol. 2, Berthold, *La ville e Paris, en vers burlesques. Journal d'un voyage à Paris, en 1675*.

Klaiwmen tou; ou̅tw- a̅percomeno-, ouj kwluw,  
klaiwmen, a̅lla; mh; a̅schmonw-, mh; trica-  
tillonte-, mh; bracion- gumnounte-, mh; o̅yin  
sparattonte-, mh; melaneimonounte-, a̅lla; monon  
kata; yuchn h̅rema dakruon a̅fiente- pikron.  
Enesti gar kai; tauth- cqri-, th- pomph-  
klausai pikrw-, kai; mh; paikai monou: paigiwn  
gar ouj den dienhnoce ta; upov tinwn ginomena.

Let us grieve with dignity, not tearing our hair, not grabbing at the face with bare hands, not wearing black clothes. Let us shed bitter tears in our souls quietly. It is appropriate to wail bitterly, without a pomp and without having fun. Do not spread jokes about things that happen.<sup>13</sup>

Sorrow should not be expressed excessively, nor replaced by laughter and life-giving joy. Moderate sadness should last forever, for one's whole life. The traditional expression of grief is characterised as futile and insincere:

Kai; gar ouj sumpaqeia- e̅keinoi oil kopetoi; oil ep  
j agora-, a̅ll j e̅jdeikew- kai; filotimia- kai;  
keodoxia- e̅i̅si: pollai; dia; te̅cnhn tauta  
poiountai. Klauson pikron, stenaxon kat j  
o̅ikian, mhdeno- o̅rwnto-. . . Touto- kaliwmen kai;  
i̅jdia kai; koinh/ pante-, a̅lla; meta; kosmiot̅hto-,  
a̅lla; meta; semnot̅hto-, a̅lla; mh; w̅ste  
paradegmatizein e̅autow Toutou- klaiwmen mh;  
mian h̅meran, mhde; deuteran a̅lla; ton panta bion  
h̅mwn.

Those who grieve excessively at the markets do not have sympathy. They are showing off arrogantly in vanity. For many of those (women) it is just a

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<sup>13</sup> Migne 62.203.

technique. Scream a little, moan at home and do not pay attention to others.....Let us all cry privately and publicly, but moderately and with dignity. Let us not disgrace ourselves. Let us cry not for a day or two, but for a whole life.<sup>14</sup>

The extreme sorrow and extreme joy that were characteristic of antiquity and traditional ritual were, by the Byzantine church fathers judged as negative. In this fragment, John Chrysostom is against self-mutilation, against wearing black, against loud lamentation and, in particular, against pomp, a joyous mood and fun at the funeral. But, as we have seen in Bakhtin's analysis, the Church did not have the power to expel *carnivalesque* rituals. However, this mood has since antiquity become less and less related to the funerals, and compensated for in the rituals of fertility. In Christian times the repression became even stronger, but the carnival survived in the festivities that, according to religious dogma, offered reasons for celebration, such as at Easter and in folk tradition. If confrontation with pain and sorrow through lamentation helps in overcoming them, then joy and happiness related to them also represent a form of support in this psychological "combat". Laughter and joy help those going through the pain and surpassing it, releasing enormous energy that represented a threat to those who wanted to control the communities – the city-state in antiquity, or the Church in Medieval times. Precisely this was the reason why excessive funerals were the target of restrictive laws since antiquity and, evidently, no legal measures were strong enough to transform and eradicate deeply rooted ritual patterns that survived here and there during the Middle Ages.

What else was left for the Church other than to adapt and to appropriate such persistent ritual to its own rules. Thus, the offerings of food that were strongly criticised by John Chrysostom, became recognised by Apostolic law (offerings on the third, and ninth days,

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<sup>14</sup> Migne 62.204.

and a year after a death – *ta trita, ta ennata* and *ta eniausia*). Although the form was kept the same, new theological explanations were ascribed to it. New meanings followed – Christ rose on the third day, the soul reaches Heaven on the ninth day and an offering after a year represents the anniversary of the death.<sup>15</sup> Instead of the ancient sacrifice on the thirtieth day, an offering was introduced on the fortieth day, which coincides with the lamentation of Moses by his people. The rule by Symeon in *de Ordine Sepulturae*, very strictly prescribed the duty of tending the tomb and making offerings. The disregarding of this law brought serious consequences.<sup>16</sup> The proscription was also aimed at lamentations and dirges that had to be replaced by psalms, hymns and prayers.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the paragraph that referred to lamentations, according to this law, the ritual had to remain the same. The priest even had to make a sacrifice of doves.<sup>18</sup>

The appropriation of pagan tradition by Christianity did not mean that Christianity gave up on imposing its own traditional patterns. This, inevitably, led to conflict. In one of his homilies, Gregory Nazians (329 – 389) describes the funeral of Basil of Caesarea. On one hand, the Church welcomed the crowds who came to express their sorrow. On the other hand, Gregory Nazians describes the clash between spontaneous lamentations and the singing of the official psalms.

**PI hrei- ajorai; stoai; diwrofoi, triwrofoi, tw  
ekeinon parapempontwn, prohgomewwn, epomenwn,  
parepomenwn, prohgomewwn, ajlhl oi-**

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<sup>15</sup> Alexiou 2002, 32. For legislation about these offerings, see *Apostolische Konstitutionen* VIII 42.1, 552.ff.ed. Funk, and Justinianus *Nov.* 133.3.1, 671 ed. Shoel.

<sup>16</sup> Migne 155.670-696.

<sup>17</sup> Migne 63.43, 50.634.

<sup>18</sup> Alexiou 2002, 32 cf. Rallis-Potlis 4.387-388: **Eij tw/ ierei ekestin peristeas- ep toi- tafoi- twn teqnewtw kai; toi- mnhmosunoi- aujtw sfagiazein.** Koukoules 211.

εἰς παντοῦν: μυριάδες γένου· παντοῦ·, καὶ ἡλικία· ἀπασ·, οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀγοραῖς καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιπέδοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσι καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἕτοιμοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀποκλεισμένοις, ἐν παντί καὶ ἐν παντί·.

There were crowds of people everywhere, in the marketplaces, arcades and buildings two and three stories high, all attending his funeral and walking behind, in front and alongside, trampling on one another. Thousands of people of every race and age, not known before, psalms giving way to lamentations, and philosophy overcome by passion. It was a struggle between our followers and outsiders-Greeks, Jews and immigrants...and the body itself only just escaped their clutches.<sup>19</sup>

The singing of psalms lasted only during the procession. At the grave there was an outbreak of uncontrolled grief, after which the last greeting (*teleutaios, aspasmos*) and burial proceeded. Wailing and loud lamentation were replaced once more by religious music, but after the soil was shovelled to the grave, spontaneous lamentation arose again in a clash with the Christian formal *aspasmos*.

The splendour of the procession that Gregory Nazians described was magnified by the torches and candles carried by the participants. Fire at the funeral was another ritual symbol that has been preserved since antiquity, keeping the old and receiving new meaning. In a story by Athenaios, five monks went to drive away the evil spirits that were torturing local villagers. They did this not only by singing psalms, but also by using the smell of the candles, since

<sup>19</sup> Migne 36.601.

“the demons do not like the smell of candles.”<sup>20</sup> This story from the second century obviously reveals belief in the apotropaic properties of fire that had been still famous in antiquity. Until the fourth century, the Christian fathers opposed the using of torches and candles because of their association with paganism.<sup>21</sup> However, ritual candles and torches were finally accepted by the Church. Even John Chrysostom, radical in regard to other elements of the traditional funeral, offered a Christian explanation that the light cast by torches and candles during the funeral helped the soul journey towards a “true light”. It was also decorative, warming and cheering to the deceased.<sup>22</sup>

As is obvious from this short review of the basic elements of the Byzantine funeral and patristic turns on this praxis, it is clear that the traditional ritual was to a large extent preserved. Despite persistent efforts of the Church and Church fathers to uproot traditional praxis, and to introduce new rituals that would fit into the new religion more appropriately, the rituals that had been practiced for centuries were impossible to eliminate. The only option that the Church had was to appropriate the ritual as it was, and to ascribe Christian meanings to it. Approximately ten centuries after the law of Solon, it turned out that new legislation was necessary once more to restrict and control the ritual.

## 2) Rethinking Balkan Dis/Continuities

In the chapter about *Time, subsequence and structure* of funeral ritual, I presented the ritual procedure concerning the dead, from archaic times until Hellenism. Comparing the funeral rituals from rural Greece or Serbia and Montenegro and some other rural Balkan areas even in the twentieth century AD, it is possible to

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<sup>20</sup> Athenaios 442a: *lucwn ojma7- ouj filousi daimone-*. (My translation).

<sup>21</sup> Rush 1941, 224-225.

<sup>22</sup> Migne 60.725.

illuminate remarkable parallels. The sequence of the ritual after a death is identical: washing and beautifying the dead body, the wake, the procession, lamenting, giving offerings, the burial and the funeral feast. I am not going to analyse all those ritual stages again – very often they coincide, and very often some local specificities appear. The wake can be held in the house or in the courtyard, the funeral feast at the grave or in the household, the methods of purification vary, etc. What interests me in particular is mapping and analysing exactly those elements of the funeral ritual that were “unstable” and rarely mentioned in antiquity and that sporadically appear as traces in the folklore of some rural communities in certain Balkan areas – those that are related to joy and laughter and those from which life-giving powers emanated.

Let me start with the funeral dance. Evidence about dance in the ancient Greek funeral come from the geometric period (IX – VIII BC). Images on the vases from this epoch reveal chain dances both of men and women.<sup>23</sup> Discussing the issue of dancing at the funeral, I have related archaeological evidence to the literary context of ancient Greece, which confirmed the relationship between the rituality of the dead and dance. Related to this is ritual dancing in some rural Balkan regions, the so-called *kolo naopako* (*the topsyturvy dance*). It is possible to trace this ritual dance in Serbian epic poetry (*Ženidba Milića barjaktara, Sestra Ivan kapetana*),<sup>24</sup> but also in the ritual tradition of Bosnia – *žalostivo kolo* (*the sad dance*). This round dance is danced in the opposite direction from the chain dances on other occasions, which means – counter-clockwise.<sup>25</sup> In his interpretation of dances, Curt Sachs suggests that the function of dancing around someone or something enables the acquisition of its power.<sup>26</sup> This argument may be supported by the fact that the direction of the dance is from the symbolic “life-side” to the “death-

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<sup>23</sup> Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 60.

<sup>24</sup> Đorđević 1907, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Zečević 1963, 491.

<sup>26</sup> Sachs 1938, 83.

side”, which means from right to left. Gaining power over the dead thus gains their grace and protection, always desirable in everyday life.<sup>27</sup> Apart from this, commenting on ritual lamentation, Vuk Karadžić says that one of the mourners is called “*kolovođa*” (the one who leads the dancing in the round-dance).<sup>28</sup>

Researching the funeral ritual in eastern Serbia in the community that Slobodan Zečević calls Vlachoï,<sup>29</sup> he noted that the wake was followed by jokes and humour, namely, that those guarding the corpse used to tell stories with a vulgar and funny content.<sup>30</sup> The researcher related this to the old ritual praxis of funerals that consisted of orgiastic elements, the aim of which was to oppose the power of death with the power of life inherent in sexual intercourse and reproduction.<sup>31</sup> Closely connected with this custom are ritual fires devoted to the dead, so-called *priveg*, characteristic of the Vlachoï in the same area of eastern Serbia and held during the

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<sup>27</sup> The same counter-clockwise direction remained in contemporary funeral rituals all over the Balkans, even in the urban regions, on the occasion of expressing condolences for someone’s death. That is, the closest kin stand around the mortuary coffin in the chapel. People approach them, while going anticlockwise around the coffin in the mentioned direction.

<sup>28</sup> Karadžić 1957, 146.

<sup>29</sup> This is the exonym used for the Romanian ethnic group in Serbia, but outside Serbia, this exonym is used differently. In Croatia, for example, it is used for denoting the Serbian population.

<sup>30</sup> This is the same type of joke that is characteristic for the ancient Greek fertility rituals. For more on connectedness of fertility and death rituals within the free area of fertility rituals, which opened the space for compensation for the restricted stages in fertility rituals, see the chapter VIII, Mapping the Anthropology of Laughter.

<sup>31</sup> According to the custom in Malorussia, on All Souls Day, women used to gather drunk at the grave where they spent the night, after which they retold their erotic dreams. On the same day they used to dance at the grave. The women who participated in this ritual were adult, and their dance was called “women’s procession”. Near Vorognez women used to gather in someone’s house, where they drank and danced in a trance. Zečević 1965, 1053 – 1062; Zečević 1967, 53; Murko 1910, 97-98.

festival of *Bele poklade* (White Carnival). In the places called Tekija and Resava, big fires used to be burned for the whole night. People gathered there to feast (to eat and drink abundantly) and to dance. It was believed that the souls of the dead also participated in this cheerful ritual performed for and devoted to them. The ritual ended in the morning and all participants then went back home, taking strict care not to look back behind them, which was the same ritual ban that existed in funeral rituals. If the deceased had died not long before the festival, only the young people danced, while the older people sat around the fire and talked.<sup>32</sup> Although this ritual praxis is basically similar to that of the Vlachoï of eastern Serbia, the fact that it is not found among Romanians in Vojvodina, which, supported with the evidence for ritual dancing and feasting on the occasion of death characteristic of old Slavic peoples that I have already mentioned, point to the conclusion that this actually represents an old Slavic inheritance.<sup>33</sup> Apart from the fore-mentioned customs of festive funeral feasts and competitions – *strava* and *trizna*, Brückner quotes an old Latin manuscript that mentions fires devoted to the dead:

In commemorationem animarum suorum cariorum...  
item dicunt... quod animae ad illum ignem veniant et  
se calefaciant.<sup>34</sup>

The custom is still found not only among the Vlachoï population, but also among Serbs in eastern Serbia, as well as in Boljevci and its surroundings, the so called *rana*. The fact that the custom of having ritual fires during dancing celebrations actually endured a greater extent among the Vlachoï than among the predominant Slavic population is to be expected – the aspiration to preserve older cultural patterns and specificities is always characteristic of a population that lives in a particular kind of

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<sup>32</sup> Mačaj 1892, 158. Zečević 1966, 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> “To the memory of their dear...They used to say that the souls came to the fire to heat themselves.” Brückner X, 385.

isolation – surrounded by other groups of people. Another argument that Zečević adds relates to ethnic origin of this minority group in Serbia. Namely, Zečević claims that the Vlachoï of eastern Serbia are neither direct and exclusive descendants of Romans, nor of Slavs, nor of Thracian tribes, and that they inherited many ritual elements from their Slavic ancestors, suggesting that a joyful atmosphere at some point in the funeral ritual represents a trace of old Slavic culture.<sup>35</sup>

The claim of Zečević that the Serbian Vlachoï bear the cultural inheritance of Romans, Slavs and Thracians is not in question. However, to claim that fire, dancing, and joy at the funeral are types of Slavic inheritance is hard to prove. Moreover, knowledge of the history and anthropology of other fore-mentioned populations opens different perspective. I have already quoted the ancient note about Thracian funeral customs by the ancient historian Herodotus, who showed that the funeral ritual among Thracians was as follows: they made abundant sacrifices, prepared a funeral feast, performed games and of course they lamented. But what was most striking for Herodotus, was that the funeral was performed in a joyful atmosphere.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the cross-references related to Roman funeral evidence indicated that processions in which the dead were carried to the grave were carnivalesque – in front of the procession went musicians, lamenters and actors wearing masks (which were actually face-prints of the deceased ancestors), while family and friends walked behind the corpse.<sup>37</sup> The actor disguised as the deceased was walking in front of all, joking, jesting and thus provoking laughter.<sup>38</sup> So, music and carnival on the occasion of a

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<sup>35</sup> Zečević 1966, 382.

<sup>36</sup> Herodotus 5. 4. 1; 5. 8. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Concerning the masks that were worn, they were chosen on the criteria of the status of the deceased. There were no masks of women, but women participated in a similar way in that, on the day of their marriage they brought with themselves the masks of their family ancestors. Cicero, *Contra Vatinius*, 28, 11. Štrebenec-Erkert 2002, 80-81. Mommsen 443, Dupont 1987, 168.

<sup>38</sup> Svetonius, *Vespasianus*, 19. Blümner 1911, 493. Čajkanović 1994, 1, 310.

funeral were not exclusively characteristic of Old Slavic people. Thus, it is hard to be certain that the fore-mentioned ritual among the Vlachoï reflects an exclusively Slavic inheritance. Going back to ancient Greek ritual, these cross-references are another argument in favour of the interpretation by Kurtz and Boardman that the round dance of men and women on the vases of the geometric period represent the funeral dance, testifying to the existence of music and joy in the pre-classical Greek funeral. This leads to the conclusion that delight and laughter were widespread ritual components of funerals in the early stages, which gradually disappeared (sooner or later), but still sporadically remained recognisable in some ritual stages of later funeral or some other ritual praxis related to the dead.<sup>39</sup> It is difficult to be sure whether this ritual represents a “borrowed” ritual, or a long continuity, but the fact that it usually appears in isolation, as for example in the Greek village Pontos, or among the group of Vlachoï in Serbia, but also among the Serbian population particularly in eastern Serbia, speaks in favour of the latter hypothesis. This would mean that such laughter is a trace of the forgotten worldview that could not discern life from death nor laughter from tears. Gradually, of course, the meaning of ritual laughter changed through time, attaining its apotropaic function, that which empowers the forces of life.

The modern cross-references that I would like to include are related once more to eastern Serbia, and specifically the town of Trstenik. The informant T.P. told me, that after the sudden death of his cousin, who was in his early twenties (the deceased was a student who drowned in a river, during the summer holidays), the village comedian appeared at the funeral and all who were present were laughing so hard that they had to “hold their stomachs”). The funeral was extremely cheerful and full of laughter.

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<sup>39</sup> Regarding dancing at funerals in Europe, clear evidence of its existence can be seen in the prohibition by Charlemagne of the ritual in the year 785. The sentence for the violation of this law was death. A century after, the pope Leo V and archbishop Hinkmar proclaimed that dancing on the occasion of death is a devilish thing. Zečević, 1963, 491.

A similar custom was noted by Veselin Čajkanović, according to the testimony of the ethnographer Tihomir Đorđević, who retold how Đ.L. from Lužani (near Aleksinac – in south-eastern Serbia) lost all three children that he had. At the burial of his last deceased child, when the coffin was being put into the grave, the grieving father started to laugh. Nobody at the funeral was surprised, realizing that it was an act of *magic (vrački)*. Similarly, in the area of Homolj, when parents lose children, and when all of their children die, except for one, at the funeral of the last deceased child, women not only adorn the last surviving child, but also the parents. Sometimes parents take part in this, sometimes not. Sometimes parents adorn themselves on their own. If the funeral happens to be on Sunday, or on the day of some festival, parents go to the place where the round dance (*kolo*) is danced and they join in. Coming home, they even sing. In this area, people used to act in similar ways when their parents died.<sup>40</sup> This points to the conclusion that the mourning and sacrifice of children and old people is not mere myth. This custom of the expression of joy obviously belongs to the old strata of religion and human cognition, revealing the special status of children and old people that might also allude to the former existence of human victims. Performing the funeral in a joyful atmosphere is a way of giving support and empowering the life-vigour that the deceased should keep in the Underworld, in order to be better and more useful protectors of the living. Laughter and joy as the strongest antidotes for death are the most powerful methods of opposing and overcoming the dreadful powers of death and darkness.<sup>41</sup>

There is another ritual stage where we come across joking and laughter, and that is the wake. This ritual in rural Serbia is described by Veselin Čajkanović, according to whom jokes are welcome at wakes. And although the wake does not exist anymore in

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<sup>40</sup> Milosavljević 1913, 251. cf. Pavlović 22, 110.

<sup>41</sup> Čajkanović 1994, 1, 311. This theme was discussed in the chapter about lapot (VI, 3).

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the funeral rituals of urban areas, where specialised services have taken over the care of the deceased from the moment of death until the burial (washing the corpse and preparing it for burial or cremation), usually on the day of someone's death or the day after it (this depends on how much time the family has to prepare something and to invite guests), the closest kin is visited by close family and friends at home, accepting their condolences. It is possible to claim that this phase of the ritual in the urban context represents a transformed stage of the wake. S.Đ told me that it is amazing how comforting and pleasant the atmosphere is on such occasions, referring particularly to the occasion when her mother-in-law died.

You forget everything. People were even telling jokes; those mild jokes. It was really nice. Nobody cried. You know – when there is food and drink, the atmosphere is always nice, people gather and talk, they enjoy, forgetting why they came in the first place. They talked about everything. Everybody asked how she died, but then, afterwards, nobody talked about death, but about everything. My father-in-law told me (and these were mostly friends of my husband and me) that it was really nice for him. Can you understand? In such a hard situation, it was nice for him. And those people are really nice, they succeeded in making him feel better.

Even today, in the urban areas, a funeral at the grave is often followed by going to a room in a café or bar, where people drink abundant brandy (*rakija*) and wine, telling jokes and “acting as if they have not come from the grave” (B.L.J.). If this is not held at a café, or bar, or at the graveyard (this is also testified in contemporary Belgrade), people invite guests to come to their home. But usually there is some alcohol and wheat served even at the cemetery after the funeral, or when leaving the graveyard. S.Đ. said that

everybody came from the grave with flushed faces from brandy and wine. The atmosphere was relaxed, probably because everything had ended. It lasted for a

long time. It was nice. In the end, my husband and I had to leave first, because the guests did not want to go.

From the expressions that are often used as a comment on people's behaviour – such as “they were not at the grave”, or “they forgot why they came”, which I have heard from many informants and in everyday conversations with people, it is obvious that such behaviour is judged as something inappropriate, something that is not expected on the occasion of death. However, accompanying the feasts with alcohol and an atmosphere that is always good and vivid on such occasions, leads to the conclusion that a good mood at the funeral is also something that is ritually expected.

Sometimes the reason for laughter at a funeral is not only related to the feast, but can be caused spontaneously. At the funeral of the father of my friend (D.B.), a man came to express his condolences. Taking off his hat, he unintentionally also took off his wig. The mourning family and friends all burst into laughter. Even though we cannot hear talk about ritual laughter and ritual acts, one thing is certain – no matter how enormous the pain and sorrow are, comical situations happen and people do laugh. But let me go back to the ritual praxis and return diachronically to the evidence that testifies to ritual joking at the wake among old Slavs. Apart from the fore-mentioned custom among Serbs, I am going to refer to the same custom preserved among the Ukrainian and Slovakian population settled in the border area of two countries, in eastern Slovakia. The specificity of this area that enabled the conservation of the old custom is that it used to be dominated by the Orthodox Church (unlike other parts of Slovakia that were under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church), and was in a sense isolated, and therefore more willing to stick to its tradition. Illustration in this sense are numerous church prohibitions researched and discussed by the Czech historian Č. Zíbrt who, in the article “Indiculus supersitionum et paganiarum”,<sup>42</sup> analysed medieval church laws concerning the issue, commenting that cousins and friends used to gather at the wake,

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<sup>42</sup> Zíbrt 1894.

where they prayed and sang religious songs. But they also used to dance, laugh, drink and sing “devil songs” as if they were not mourning, but celebrating the death of the deceased.<sup>43</sup>

If we take into consideration that those wakes were night-time vigils to guard the corpse, we might suppose that a cheerful atmosphere actually had the apotropaic function of protecting the community from the forces of death, especially at night, which is the part of the day when ghosts and demons of death threaten.<sup>44</sup> This is also the reason why this ritual is always shared by many representatives of the closest family and friends, but in earlier times it used to be shared with the wider community.

Another parallel ritual pattern that appears among ancient Greeks and old Slavic peoples are funeral contests. The description of so-called Slavic *trizna*, performed especially for eminent people, corresponds to the description of Patroklos’ funeral in the *Iliad*. The funeral ritual thus included numerous sacrifices including humans, and feasts and contests for which prizes or even the property of the deceased were awarded. These customs are described in the medieval Chronicle by the Russian historian Nestor, referring to contemporary Slavic custom.<sup>45</sup> The evidence for funeral contests in the Slavic, that is, in the Serbian, tradition, might also be confirmed by other rituals related to the dead and by folkloristic material.<sup>46</sup> For instance, on Theodore’s Saturday (*Todorova subota*), which has the chthonic character of a festival devoted to the dead, an equestrian contest is performed. On that occasion, the horsemen have masked

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> In the Serbian tradition, the guarding of corpse at the wake also had the function of keeping an animal (e.g., a cat, hen or dog) from straying across the dead, because it was believed that such an event might turn the dead into a vampire. The same danger of turning into a vampire was eliminated if at least one person guarded the corpse at the wake. Čajkanović 1994, 2, 219.

<sup>45</sup> Mansikka 1922, 75.

<sup>46</sup> *Trizna* among South Slavs is confirmed by the traces in language – toponomastics and numerous rituals. See Filipović 1958, 335-336.

faces.<sup>47</sup> Concerning folkloristic evidence, significant example of parallels to the description of Patroklos' funeral is found in the Serbian oral tradition, in the poem *Smrt vojvode Kaice* (*Duke Kaica's Death*). The only difference between the two epical paradigms is that the contest in the *Iliad* is being performed after the funeral, while in the Serbian paradigm, sport competitions precede the funeral. Thus, Duke Kaica dies during the fifth contest (after racing, cart racing, jumping and throwing the stone). Following the funeral, which is very similar to that of Patroklos, human sacrifices are also offered – of Hungarian soldiers.

It is obvious that numerous studies of and research into the funeral rituals in some Balkan areas (Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria etc.) often pay very little attention to, or completely neglect, the phenomena of competitions, dancing and laughter at the funeral. The closest intrinsic relationship between the wake, jokes and dance also connects funeral contests and the principal of *agon* that embodies the combat between life and death. This phase of the funeral ritual puts on stage a real contest, the participants in which always show the same inviolable and joyous victory of the forces of life over the powers of death. And apart from saying farewell to the deceased as they pass on to the Underworld, this is the most important function of funeral ritual.

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<sup>47</sup> Moskovljević 1962, 280. cf. Zečević 1963, 487.

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## 5) Abbreviations

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*CVA* – *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, vols. 1-2 (Grèce, Athènes, Musée Nationale). Union Académique Internationale, Paris 1954.

*Peek* – *Griechische Vers-Inschriften*, Berlin 1995.

*LGS* – *Leges Graecorum Sacrae*, de Protz, J. and Ziehen, L. Leipzig, 1896, 1906.

*RE* – *Realencyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumskunde*, Pauly, A., Wissowa, G. and Kroll, W. Studgart 1893.

*OCD* – *The Oxford Classical Dictionary of the Classical World*, Oxford 2005.

*TrGF* – *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Snell, I.B. (ed.), vol.i. *Didacaliae ragicae, Catalogi Tragicorum et Tragoedaiarum Testimonia et Fragmenta Tragicorum Minorum* Götting 1981.

### b) Periodicals:

*AJA* American Journal of Archeology

*AION* Annali dell'Istituto universitario orientale di Napoli

*AmJAnchHist* American Journal of Ancient History

*AM* Mitteilungen de deutschen archäologische Instituts, Athenische Abteilung, Stuttgart

*SEZb* Srpski etnografski zbornik

*TAPA* Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association

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## XII

# Смех на погребу: антички грчки погребни ритуал у родној и антрополошкој перспективи (сажетак)

На гробљу су сви мртви, само су жене живе.

(Душко Радовић)

Сматра се да је погребни ритуал један од најстаријих обреда људске заједнице. Његово проучавање од архајске Грчке до данашњих дана показало је да од свих савремених ритуала управо погребни чува највише традиционалних елемената. Па ипак, то не значи да овај обред није био подложен променама – како у самом извођењу, тако и у значењу појединих етапа. Будући да се одвијао у тренутку кризе изазване смрћу која је погађала читаву заједницу, управо је брига око покојника и око адекватног и успешно обављењог ритуала обезбеђивала моћ, и то женама, које су у свим другим приликама биле обесправљене. То је био разлог што су се око надлежности над мртвима и смрћу непрекидно водиле „борбе“, и што су још од VI века п. н. е. државне заједнице (полиси), а касније и црква, настојали да успоставе контролу над овим ритуалом и над онима које су га вршиле. Неке етапе ритуала су се показале као веома отпорне на репресивне законе (такво је нпр. нарицање над покојником, које се одржавало паралелно са црквеним опелом), неке су потиснуте у други план, или су чак потпуно нестале. Савременом човеку је смех најтеже појмљива појава погребног обреда (која се чак у многим антрополошким и етнолошким проучавањима превиђа и занемарује). Управо проучавање схватања смрти и посмртних обреда у дужем историјском распону отвара перспективу за разумевање овог ритуалног чина који је данас неодвојиво повезан са даћом, тј. једењем након сахране – на гробљу, у кафани, или у покојниковој кући. Једење и пијење алкохола

неоспорно представља манифестацију живота, а добро расположење, које је подједнако предуслов и последица гозбе, увек је праћено збијањем шала. Које место је имао смех у погребним ритуалима од антике до данас? Какво је било значење тог смеха и са каквим је назорима о животу и смрти он био повезан? У којој форми је постојала, и постоји ли још увек неритуална форма која обједињује смех и смрт?

Немогуће је разматрати однос смеха и смрти без преиспитивања начина на који су се заједница и појединци суочавали са смрћу, што подразумева целовито бављење погребним ритуалима,<sup>1</sup> разматрање односа између смрти и моћи, као и различитих концепата смрти.<sup>2</sup> Стога ћу се, након методолошког и теоријског приступа самој теми, најпре позабавити појединим фазама погребног ритуала и оним што је у ширем контексту друштвеног живота овај обред значао, и то у античкој Грчкој. Ова књига написана је на основу истраживања која се пре свега односе на период између архајског и хеленистичког доба, с тим да сам узимала у обзир и претходне и потоње периоде, у оној мери у којој су промене које су се тада дешавале биле релевантне за тему, тј. разматрање односа смеха и смрти.

Методолошки приступ овој теми везан је за француску антрополошку школу проучавања антике, која се развила у Центру Луј Жерне (Lui Gernet) у Паризу, а чији су најзначајнији представници Жан Пјер Вернан (Jean-Pierre Vernant), Никол Лоро (Nicole Loraux), Пјер Видал Наке (Pierre Vidal Naquet) и други. Сам центар је добио име по пиониру овог иновативног приступа антици, Лују Жернеу (Lui Gernet), који је преиспитујући и критикујући методе конзервативне немачке филолошке школе, увео антрополошки приступ антици. Метод се заснива на ишчитавању античких текстова и материјала, и то

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<sup>1</sup> Фазама погребног ритуала подробно сам се бавила у поглављима III и IV.

<sup>2</sup> Различитим концептима смрти, наративима о смрти, као и географији подземног света, посветила сам II поглавље.

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уз помоћ других античких текстова. То је, дакле, покушај да се превазиђе ишчитавање антике са савремене тачке гледишта, те настојање да се антика сагледа у контексту свог времена.

Са друге стране, за антрополошко проучавање антике веома су драгоцене и савремена антрополошка теренска истраживања и поређења грчке културе и других култура (без обзира на то колико су оне међусобно сличне, или пак различите и временски удаљене), што помаже позиционирању у односу на одређени друштвени или културни контекст. У том смислу, истраживање антике комбиновала сам са резултатима етнографских истраживања у руралној Грчкој, али и код нас. Могуће је уочити бројне паралеле, с тим да је увек важно водити рачуна о времену и контексту, чиме се и мења значење одређених традиционалних модела, који се од културе до културе разликују. Ова поређења, такође, отварају могућност да се традиционални модели, кроз поређење са сличним моделима из других култура, сагледају из шире перспективе. За методолошко становиште Француске антрополошке школе такође је веома значајно и то што различите приступе и методологије сматра пожељним, а не међусобно искључивим. Прихвативши концепт *long durée*, Фернана Бродела (Fernand Braudel), о томе да је историјске догађаје могуће схватити само ако се анализирају у дугим временским интервалима (тзв. догађаји дугог трајања), осим смехом, бавила сам се и тужбалицом и у контексту Грчке двадесетог века. Бродел, наиме, повезује сличне догађаје у различитим временским периодима, да би разумео њихово значење и анонимног историјског актера.<sup>3</sup>

У овакав приступ уклапа се и становиште Филипа Ариеса (Philippe Ariès), једног од најзначајних истраживача смрти на Западу у двадесетом веку. Полазећи од чињенице да до промена у погребној ритуалној пракси долази веома споро, Ариес тврди да свако проучавање смрти мора нужно да се заснива на

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<sup>3</sup> Braudel 1998.

храбром померању кроз векове (чак и на њиховом прескакању), јер су грешке које се у том случају могу појавити много мање опасне од оних које би се појавиле у проучавањима ограниченим на краћи временски период.<sup>4</sup>

Однос смеха и смрти разматрала сам кроз призму теорије Олге Фреиденберг. Она је, такође, била свесна да терминологија којом располажемо није потпуно адекватна за објашњавање и разумевање неке друге, тј. античке културе, заправо још и пре него што су то истакли представници Француске антрополошке школе. Међутим, будући да је живела почетком XX века, а због руског језика на коме је писала, остала је релативно дуго непозната у ширим, светским научним круговима. Бавећи се античким фолклором, Олга Фреиденберг је проучавала настанак књижевних жанрова из ритуала и њихову међусобну повезаност. Њено основно полазиште било је да се кроз фолклор и ритуал (а и књижевност која је из њих настала) чувају окамењене форме, али да оне – током времена и у измењеним друштвеним контекстима – добијају нова значења. Бавећи се управо овим промењеним значењима, Олга Фреиденберг је такође настојала и да реконструише рани начин мишљења и перципирања света у античкој Грчкој, који се очувао као реликт у митовима и ритуалима. Ова теоретичарка је најранији стадијум мишљења повезивала са идентификацијом, тј. немогућношћу перцепције себе одвојено од других, одвојено од света који је окруживао човека, одвојено од тотема, тј. божанства, а процес разлучивања субјекта од објекта није још био завршен почетком класичног периода. За такву перцепцију света такође је особено и непостојање категорије времена. Време се схватало искључиво „просторно“, па су људи замишљали да прошлост и будућност постоје негде другде у *простору* у односу на садашњост и управо то је био разлог што није постојала јасна разлика између живота и смрти. Мртви су били сматрани живима, али на неком другом месту. Нејасне

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<sup>4</sup> Ariès 1989, 15.

границе између живота и смрти чиниле су нејасним и границе између смеха и суза. У аграрном периоду долази до раздвајања ових појмова, али смех и сузе су наставили да постоје напоредо, с тим да се њихово значење постепено мењало. Смех ни данас није нестао из погребног ритуала, али његово присуство у контексту смрти често је замагљено, представљајући остатак једног заборављеног и напуштеног погледа на свет.

Међутим, да би се уопште разматрао смех у контексту смрти, неопходно је најпре се позабавити погребним ритуалом у целини. У Грчкој, од антике до данас, смрт и ритуали који је окружују захтевали су женско ангажовање. Није било смрти без целовитог погребног ритуала (према веровању да покојник може стићи у свет мртвих тек након обављања свих фаза погребног ритуала), нити је било погреб без жена. Задатак жена био је да окупају покојника, намиришу га, дотерају и обуку, да припреме храну и, што је најважније, да наричу над мртвима. Све ове активности погребног ритуала, за које се веровало да помажу покојницима да напусте овај свет, захтевале су комуникацију са светом мртвих, што је нужно доводило до ритуалне нечистоће (*Miasma*) која прати сваки контакт са мртвима. Можда је баш то разлог што је патријархална пракса допуштала, тј. препуштала женама оне активности које су биле повезане са ризиком да буду изложене *мијазми*<sup>5</sup> (истој врсти ритуалне нечистоће која се везује за рађање и менструацију). То је амбивалентна позиција, која, са једне стране, угрожава жене, али истовремено потврђује њихову компетентност и препушта им моћ која се пре свега испољава у извођењу тужбалица. Каткада је реч о професионалним нарикачама, каткада о најближим сродницама

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<sup>5</sup> Мијазми су били изложени најближи сродници покојника и све/сви они који су били у директном контакту са смрћу и са мртвима. Упрљаност овом ритуалном нечистоћом носила је са собом социјалну изолацију (забрану одласка на јавна места, у храмове и на јавне церемоније), па су је се клонили мушкарци чији је живот био саткан од јавних, грађанских дужности.

(мајци, сестри, супрузи), али увек су то жене које тугују, изражавајући наглас свој бол.

С обзиром на чињеницу да су за посмртне ритуале делегиране жене, управо је то простор у коме оне освајају моћ и ауторитет, како у обреду тако и у социјалној и културној сфери. Успостављање и диференцијација родних улога у ритуалу утичу на стварање различитих, родно конструисаних наратива: мушкарци су мање у контакту са сопственим емоцијама, дистанцирани су и више у страху од смрти, а жене продиру у јавну сферу која је у другим приликама за њих затворена. Управо за време погребног ритуала жене иступају из приватности *куће (oikos-a)* у јавну сферу. Према речима Гејл Холст Вархафт (Gail Holst Warhaft), „постоји барем један јавни простор у коме жене доминирају, а то је гробље. И ако се женски глас не чује ван куће у осталим приликама, пред лицем смрти чује га цела заједница.”<sup>6</sup> Надиа Сереметакис (Nadia Seremetakis) је своју књигу о ритуалној тужбалици у Манију (на Пелопонезу) назвала *The Last Word*,<sup>7</sup> јер жене су оне које последње говоре и које последње процењују.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Holst-Warhaft, 1995, 53.

<sup>7</sup> У књизи под називом *The Last Word*, Надиа Семетакис представила је и анализирала теренско истраживање у регији Мани на Пелопонезу, које је радила 80-их година прошлог века. У овом истраживању она се бавила социјалном праксом у вези са смрћу (нарицањем, сновима као предсказањима смрти, сахрањивањем, као и историјском инскрипцијом емоција и њиховим континуитетом и дисконтинуитетом), као унутрашњим маргинама глобалног модренитета. Надиа Сереметакис је учила да су заједнице ових изолованих села на југу Пелопонеза организоване око две сродничке институције: *gerondiki* – савет старца и *klama* – женски савет задужен за погребне церемоније. Ове две институције истовремено су комплементарне и супротстављене. И док *gerondiki* представља формално-правну институцију, *klama* делује индиректно, кроз јавни ритуал, врло често управо кроз обред преиспитујући одлуке које је *gerondiki* донео, а у вези са наследством, брачним везама и крвном осветом. Ово сведочи о свепрожимајућој критици коју су жене успевале да искажу кроз ритуал, и то пре свега на сахранама, где су речи изговорене у тужбалици

Нарицање које је праћено кукањем и самоповређивањем (чупањем косе, гребањем лица, вађењем очију) представља излив емоција који доноси олакшање како онима које наричу као тако и осталим ожалошћеним. Па ипак, тужбалица није потпуно спонтана форма; она представља креативно и контролисано изражавање (користи се формулама, перформансом, специфичним покретима тела), и осим туге и бола преноси поруку, представљајући субверзивни комуникациони модел. Моћ тужбалице лежи управо у болу, који не дозвољава заборав и захтева очување сећања, а то је често у античкој Грчкој било у колизији са наративима које је владајуће патријархално друштво наметало због одређених политичких интереса и циљева. Управо то је разлог што је у атинском полису VI века п. н. е. Солон увео закон који је ограничавао улогу жена у погребном ритуалу. Како сазнајемо од Плутарха, историчара много млађег од Солона, једна од регулатива овог закона, која стоји у вези са непријатељством које је могло трајати и након нечије смрти, јесте забрана да се о мртвима говори лоше; ово упућује на преношење непријатељства са генерације на генерацију, па отуда и тумачење да се ради о мери против крвне освете.<sup>9</sup>

Слични закони су се, отприлике истовремено, појавили и на другим местима у Грчкој (нпр. на острву Кос, у Делфима, итд),<sup>10</sup> и сви су они у првом реду били усмерени на ограничавање броја и начина понашања женских рођака на сахранама. Захтевало се да жене постану тише и мање видљиве. Време доношења ових закона подудару се са нестанком кланова

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представљале крајњи одговор, тј. одлуку коју је заједница поштовала. Из тог је разлога Надија Сереметакис назвала своју књигу *Последња реч*. Seremetakis, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Грoбљем као јединим јавним простором на коме су жене имале право да говоре јавно, као и законским мерама усмереним на ограничавање овог права, бавим се у поглављу V.

<sup>9</sup> Плутарх, *Солон* 21. 1.

<sup>10</sup> LGS 93 A, 74 C.

и развојем полиса као државног уређења, и непосредно претходи увођењу атинске демократије, која је несумњиво држала жене далеко од политичке и јавне сфере, настојећи да контролише погребни ритуал и искористи то као начин контроле грађана.

Али, да се вратим на саму обредну форму: туговање и нарицање пратило је заправо све етапе погребног ритуала – од улепшавања покојника, преко бдења и процесције, до саме сахране. Па ипак, сахраном се овај ритуал није завршавао. Следила је даћа (*peridepnon*, *kathedra*), која се одржавала трећег, деветог, четрдесетог дана и након једне године од покојникове смрти, као и на годишњим задушницама – (*Nekisia i Genesisia*). Осим хране, неизоставно се пило и вино, а тон у коме се спомињао покојник за време гозбе (на сахрани или задушницама) потпуно се променио – туга и плач уступили би место смеху, анегдотама, лепим и шаљивим сећањима на покојника. У геометријском периоду,<sup>11</sup> даћа се организовала на гробу,<sup>12</sup> али је након рестриктивних закона пресељена у кућу,<sup>13</sup> и то према следећој процедури: након *либаџија* (жртва леваница) на гробу, процесција се враћала кући, испред које је стајао ћуп са водом ради ритуалног чишћења неопходног након контакта са мртвима, а пре јела.<sup>14</sup> После тога, гозба је могла да почне, а тиме и присећање на покојника, које се одвијало у измењеном тону – у атмосфери славља и хумора, на шта упућује античка пословица „говорити вицкасто као о мртвима“,<sup>15</sup> која имплицира хумор и духовите импровизације у овој фази

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<sup>11</sup> Периодизације за старије епохе увек варирају, а ово доба, названо по геометријском стилу вазног сликарства, најчешће се датира између 900 и 700 г. п. н. е.

<sup>12</sup> Види Хомер, *Илијада* XXIV 665-882.

<sup>13</sup> Фотије s.v. *καθεδρα*, RE 720 s.v. *peridepnon*.

<sup>14</sup> Parker 1983, 36; Garland 1990, 44, 147-148.

<sup>15</sup> *εἰς δέκλια ἰεγεῖν ... ὑβερὶ; τεχνικῶτι*.

обрета.<sup>16</sup> Осим тога, не постоји гозба без доброг расположења. Према Бахтину, једење је процес који омогућава брисање граница између тела и света који га окружује. Тело тријумфује и слави победу, а управо ово славље је разлог што једење никада не може бити тужно, и што су гозбе увек веселе и радосне. Тријумф гозбе је уједно и тријумф живота над смрћу.<sup>17</sup>

У архајском периоду, даћа није била последња етапа погребна, већ су следили плес и *агон*, који су обележени истом врстом расположења. *Агон* се појављивао као део ритуалне праксе све до класичног периода, али већ од VII в. п. н. е. он је све ређе био део сахрана, а све чешће је био организован у контексту херојског култа, да би на крају постао његов ексклузивни део. Ове игре, тј. надметања која су се одржавала периодично, обично су се у митологији повезивале са одређеним херојем, уз давање описа њиховог настанка. Ако узмемо у обзир кохезивну функцију коју је херојски култ имао у политичком животу полиса (култ хероја, заправо, јесте био култ мртвих, али не предака, већ људи који су имали заслуге за ширу друштвену заједницу, формирану на политичким, а не клановским основама), локални карактер ових игара не изненађује. Осим тога, политичка организација античке Грчке била је заснована на независним полисима (који су, додуше, повремено правили политичке алијансе), а осећај припадања грчком свету (који би био пандан концепту грчке нације у савременом значењу те речи) није ни постојао. А да је постојао, сигурно би постојали и херој, и светилиште, и читав митолошки систем који би помагао да се тај осећај развије и очува. Стога не изненађује да су само четири *агона* функционисала као панхеленска: до данас чувене олимпијске игре, питијске, истмијске и немејске. У сваком случају, славље и такмичења нису нестали из култа мртвих, али су остали резервисани само за одабране покојнике.

<sup>16</sup> Anaxandrid, fr. 1, Edmonds 1961, 2.444.

<sup>17</sup> Бахтин 1978, 299-300.

Постојала је још једна етапа ритуала која је следила након даће, ретко спомињана након архајског периода, а то је плес. Наиме, бројне сликане вазе из позног геометријског периода (IX – VIII в. п. н. е.), које се везују за контекст смрти и сахране, често упризоравају коло у коме плешу мушкарци или жене. Према интерпретацији коју су понудили Курц и Бордин (Kurtz, Boardman), ради се о погребном плесу.<sup>18</sup> У вези са овим вазама су и оне које приказују по две фигуре које седе за столом (квадратна структура), држећи у рукама неку врсту музичких инструмената (звечка или чегрталка), или пак нар.<sup>19</sup> Коло у свету мртвих појављује се и у Аристофановим *Жабама* и у Вергилијевој *Енеиди*.<sup>20</sup> Семантичка веза између плеса и смрти посведочена је и у чувеном сановнику хеленистичког аутора Артемидора Далидануса, у коме је записано да сан у коме неко плеше у јавном простору наговештава смрт. До византијског периода плес се више не спомиње.<sup>21</sup> Па ипак, из коментара византијске патристике очигледно је да из традиционалног ритуала нису нестале шале, забава и игра, које византијски коментатори осуђују:

„Тугујмо достојанствено, без чупања косе, гребања лица голим рукама и без црне одеће. Проливајмо горке сузе тихо у својим душама. Прикладно је горко патити, без помпе и без забаве. Не збијајте шале о ономе што се догодило.”

(Јован Хризостом IV-V, *Migne* 62.204)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kurtz & Boardman 1971, 60.

<sup>19</sup> Исто, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Аристофан, *Жабе*, 448. Вергилије, *Енеида*, 6, 664.

<sup>21</sup> Поглавље X.1 посвећено је хришћанским изворима и коментарима традиционалних погребних обичаја.

<sup>22</sup> Kai; gar ouj sumpaqeia- ekeinoi oil kopetoi; oil ep j aggora-, aji j ejdeikew-kai; filotimia- kai; keodoxia- eijsi: pollai; dia; tecnhn tauta poiountai. Klaujon pikron, stenaxon kat j oijkian, mhdeno- ofwnto-. . . Touto-kaliwmen kai; ijdia kai; koinh/ pante-, aji la; meta; kosmiothto-, aji la; meta;

Ритуални плес у истој форми није потпуно нестао ни из неких руралних делова Балкана, и могуће га је још увек пронаћи понегде у Србији и Босни (коло наопако, жалостиво коло),<sup>23</sup> а посведочено је и у српској народној поезији (*Женидба Милића барјактара, Сестра Иван капетана*).<sup>24</sup> Ово коло се игра у супротном смеру од осталих кола, значи слева надесно.<sup>25</sup> Према интерпретацији Курта Сакса (Curt Sachs), функција плесања у колу увек је успостављање моћи над неким или нечим.<sup>26</sup> Ако се том аргументу придода и чињеница да се ово коло игра са симболичке „стране живота“ у правцу „смрти“, може се протумачити да се овим плесом задобијају милост и заштита предака, које су увек пожељне у свакодневном животу.<sup>27</sup>

Могуће је претпоставити да је и нестанак плеса из погребне ритуалне праксе повезан са рестриктивним законима и увођењем државне структуре полиса, који су од погребна настојали да направе неприметан, скроман и тих догађај, што овај ритуал свакако није одувек био. Према речима Емили Вермјул (Emily Vermeule), до Солоновог закона: „добра сахрана је увек била пуна забаве, на којој је поновно окупљена фамилија размењивала емоције и новости о породици, племену и граду.“<sup>28</sup> Међутим, и након рестриктивних закона (а делимично управо и

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semnothto-, a]l]a; mh; w]ste paradigmatizein eboutou Toutou- klaiwmen mh; mian hmeran, mhde; deuteran a]l]a; ton panta bion hmwn. Migne 62.204.

<sup>23</sup> У поглављу Х.2 бавим се преиспитивањем конинуитета и дисконтинуитета неких ритуалних елемената погребног ритуала на ширем простору Балкана.

<sup>24</sup> Ђорђевић 1907, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Зечевић 1963, 491.

<sup>26</sup> Sachs 1938, 83.

<sup>27</sup> Исти смер, супротно од казаљке на сату, постоји и у савременом погребном ритуалу широм Балкана, чак и у градовима, и то приликом изјављивања саучешћа. Тада, наиме, најближи сродници покојника стоје у капели, поред ковчега, а људи који им прилазе да изјаве саучешће ходају у поменутом смеру.

<sup>28</sup> Vermeule 1979, 3.

захваљујући њима) који су ограничавали женску улогу у погребу,<sup>29</sup> жене су успеле да очувају аутономију у искључиво женским ритуалима, као и у онима у којима су имале водећу улогу, попут Тесмофорија, Антестерија, Елеусинских мистерија и Адонија. Ови празници су представљали шансу да жене компензују значај и улогу који су им умањени у погребном ритуалу.<sup>30</sup> По карактеру, ово су карневалски обреди који уједињују оплакивање умрлог божанства и неконтролисано и разуздано опсцено понашање, што нас доводи до Бахтинове теорије отвореног тела које има моћ да се сучели са есхатолошком тамом, на тај начин пркосећи смрти.<sup>31</sup> Ово одговара становишту Олге Фреиденберг да је семантику смеха и опсценост у ритуалима Деметри, који се везују за плодност Земље, потребно довести у везу са аграрном фазом, у којој је постојало веровање да је и сексуалност људи сведена на репродуктивну моћ и да је идентификована са природом.<sup>32</sup> Дакле, живот и смрт више не представљају један јединствен, недељив, испреплетен феномен, већ је живот предуслов смрти, исто као што је смрт предуслов новог рађања.

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<sup>29</sup> Упркос законским одредбама и другим мерама које је држава предузимала како би ограничила утицај и моћ жена у погребном ритуалу, то у потпуности никада није успело. Ово представља траг старе европске религије неолита (микенске културе) када моћ није приписивана искључиво Великој Богињи која је контролисала плодност читаве природе, већ и женама чији је утицај у друштву био тесно повезан са поштовањем које су стицале значајном улогом у религиозном животу. Са инвазијом ратничке индоевропске религије, Велика Богиња животног циклуса наставила је да постоји кроз неколико различитих женских божанстава (Деметра, Персефона, Хеката, Артемида), а смрт је престала да се слави као почетак новог живота. Види више у Gimbutas 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Alexiou 2002, 21; Holst-Warhaft 1995, 117.

<sup>31</sup> У поглављу VII бавила сам се смехом у ширем ритуалном контексту.

<sup>32</sup> Freidenberg 1997, 93. У вези са овим је и приношење погаче на жртву (тј. округлог хлеба), што стоји у семантичкој вези са мушком и женском сексуалношћу. Сведочанство о овоме налазимо у *Scholia, Lucian, Mer.* VII, 4 и *Atheneus*, 646 a.

Идеје Бахтина и Фреиденбергове подударају се у приличној мери. Па ипак, полазне тачке, тј. перспективе ово двоје теоретичара разликују се. Док се Бахтин фокусирао на семантику карневала у средњовековној култури, пажња Фреидебергове је била више усмерена на изучавање начина размишљања у коме се карневализација обликовала, кроз рану семантику пародијског. Дакле, док Бахтина више занима природа карневализације, Фреиденбергова настоји да мапира порекло карневализације у фоклору и ритуалној традицији античке Грчке. Она се бави најранијим облицима мита и књижевности, препознајући у њима поглед на свет који се разликује од нашег и који је омогућио понашање/реакцију/светоназор, који увек укључују и радост и смех, без обзира на то колико је тешко суочавање које живот – или смрт – тог тренутка носе са собом.

Али како Фреиденбергова интерпретира овај концепт? Она тврди да домен комичног у антици представља сазнајну категорију, посебно у фазама предапстрактног и премегафоричког размишљања. Двоструки поглед на свет увек обухвата двоструке аспекте једног истог феномена, а један од њих увек представља пародију другог. Овај дуални принцип није базиран на бинарном погледу на свет, већ, како тврди Фреиденбергова, представља тоталитет сачињен и од једног и од другог, од две неодвојиве „стране“ које се стално смењују, стапају, преплићу и непрекидно представљају два аспекта једне исте реалности. Исто као што сенка увек прати Сунце, читав универзум сачињен је од два супротстављена принципа, а други принцип је увек хибристичан, комичан. Овај концепт, који се односи на премегафоричку фазу мишљења, није имао функцију да исмева (у том смислу термин, тј. његов превод, *пародијски* није потпуно адекватан). На семантичком нивоу, он представља аспект, потенцијал позитивно-негативне испреплетаности, која је често оличена у митским представама стварања и разарања универзума. Тај принцип је могуће препознати у бројним варијантама, али је свакако најизраженији у гротески.

Катарзичне слике су, према Фреиденберговој, увек дуалистичке, и у њима се увек спајају чисто и нечисто. У том смислу, Фреиденбергова тврди да је термин *хибристичан* најбоље превести речју *пародичан*, с тим да се искључи савремена димензија апстракције. Античка пародија, дакле, представља хибристичну, смешну страну, аспект стварности који је напросто дисторзија озбиљности, али без исмевања. Тако два аспекта сачињавају свето – озбиљност и, насупрот њој, оно што је окренуто наглавачке.<sup>33</sup>

Ова интерпретација, која се заснива на теоријама Бахтина и Фреиденбергове, отворила је занимљиве могућности да се прошири перспектива кроз поновно ишчитавање Чајкановићевог концепта *магијског смеха*. Аргументација Веселина Чајкановића везана за *магијски смех* заснива се на проучавању српког фолклорног материјала, као и на проучавању ритуалног жртвовања људи на античком Медитерану, у коме је смрт праћена смехом.<sup>34</sup> У песми *Смрт цара Уроша*, забележеној у Вуковој VI књизи (бр. 14), забринувши се што јој се син не враћа кући, мајка је кренула у шуму да га тражи, и тамо је срела калуђера који јој је рекао следеће:

Бога теби, Урошева мајко,  
Пођи мало унапредак, мајко,  
Па погледај на ту десну стану,  
Опазићеш понајвишу јелу...  
Онде лежи дијете Уроше,...  
Њега јесте ујко погубио...  
Бог т'убио, Урошева мајко,  
Ако њега сузама полијеш,  
Ти се на нег' гроктом насмејавај.

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<sup>33</sup> Freidenberg 1987, 330-331.

<sup>34</sup> Ритуалним смехом, ритуалима жртвовања и жртви фармакоса посветила сам поглавље VI.

Калуђер, дакле, изричито упозорава Урошеву мајку да никако не сме да заплаче (Бог т'убио, Урошева мајко, Ако њега сузама полијеш), подсећајући је да је то ситуација у којој мора да се насмеје. У наставку песме сазнајемо да је тако и поступила. Овај смех сигурно није спонтан, већ има ритуалну функцију. Осим овог примера, Чајкановић спомиње и ритуал који је у Лужанима забележио Тихомир Ђорђевић, према коме је на дечјој сахрани, нарочито уколико то није прво дете које је преминуло, било уобичајно да се отац насмеје након спуштања ковчега у земљу. То никога на сахрани није изненађивало, и Чајкановић тврди да је тај смех ритуалан, *магијски*, тј. *врачки*. У области Хомоља, у случају када су у некој породици деца често умирала, оно дете које би остало живо, увек је било на сахрани лепо и свечано одевено. Каткада то није важило само за дете, већ и за ожалашћене родитеље, који, очито, жалост нису смели претерано да испољавају. Ако се таква сахрана одвијала недељом и уколико је био неки празник, родитељи су се по повратку са сахране обавезно придруживали слављу и плесали у колу. На повратку кући чак су и певали. Слични обичаји у овом крају важили су и за сахрану старих људи.<sup>35</sup>

Ако се свему овоме дода веровање да мртви у подземном свету остају исти какви су били у тренутку сахране, може се закључити да смех у тренутку смрти или погребна свакако није знак доброг расположења, већ да заправо представља најснажнију манифестацију живота и противотров за смрт, који треба да испрати мртве на њихов пут у онострано. У том смислу, уколико смех постоји у тренутку смрти, и чак уколико особа која умире може у том тренутку да се насмеје, смех ће је пратити заувек. Тако, смех у тренутку смрти обезбеђује бесмртност.<sup>36</sup>

*Магијски смех* који се појављује у контексту погребних ритуала или приношења људских жртава треба схватити као

<sup>35</sup> Милосављевић 1913, 251. Упореди Павловић, 22, 110.

<sup>36</sup> Чајкановић 1994, 1, 293, 292. 301-303.

траг старог и заборављеног схватања светог, у смислу у ком то предлаже Олга Фреиденберг: као пародијски аспект, неодвојивно и снажно повезан са својим екстремним опозитом – са ужасом смрти.

Раздвајање пародијског/комичног аспекта од озбиљног довело је и до разграничења концепта живота и смрти, а пародијско је наставило да функционише независно, и то пре свега (када говоримо о антици) у жанру комедије.<sup>37</sup> Значење смеха и комичног у погребном ритуалу заборављено је, али ритуални образац је било тешко променити управо због табуа којим је смрт окружена. Функција, тј. значење које се очувало јесте превазилажење бола и губитка, опорављање од шока који суочавање са смрћу увек носи, и начин да се људи носе са њом у свакодневном животу. Сам чин смејања на сахрани почео је у класичном периоду<sup>38</sup> да означава ону фазу обреда која је представљала почетак враћања у реалност и симболично заокруживање интензивне фазе нарицања и туговања. Првобитно значење које је смех имао изгубило се (наизменично смењивање „озбиљног“ и „пародијског“), али су се регенеративне функције смеха очувале.

Спомињање комедије и њен значај у раздвајању „пародијског“ и „озбиљног“ погледа на свет отвара још један ритуални и друштвени контекст, важан за разумевање односа смеха и смрти, а веома значајан допринос овој теми дао је Милан Будимир, југословенски класичар и лингвиста (1891-1975). У раду „Порекло европске сцене“, Будимир се бавио настанком античког позоришта кроз проучавања култа бога Диониса, обративши пажњу на све специфичности и хипостазе овог божанства, што му је омогућило управо изузетно познавање старобалканских језика. Бавећи се лингвистичким терминима везаним за позориште и култ бога Диониса, Будимир је дао иновативне увиде везане за ову тему, понудивши такође и

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<sup>37</sup> Веза позоришта и смрти, тј. култа мртвих, тема је поглавља бр. VIII.

<sup>38</sup> Сматра се да је класични период трајао од 480 до 323 г. п. н.е.

ново тумачење речи *tragēdiā*, која је дуго и погрешно превођена као „јарчева песма“.

Будимиров аргумент је да термин *tragōidia*, у поређењу са *trugōidia* и *trugōidos* (ова два термина увео је Аристофан преузевши их од перипатетичара, и то за означавање драмске форме која је супротна трагедији), има алтернацију која је типична за илирску фонетику (*a/u*).<sup>39</sup> Овоме је додао и податак да се у Софокловој драми *Трагачи* сатир назва *Drakus*, а поред тога и чињеницу да је латинска реч за глумца илирског порекла – *draucus*, у вези са грчким *drakus*, *drakustēs* – речима које означавају комедијаша, лакрдијаша, глумца. Тако је Будимир закључио да веза између сатира (лакрдијаша) и јарчева (*tragoi*) може бити искључиво параetimолошка адаптација речи којом се означава глумац.<sup>40</sup>

Осим лингвистичких аргумената, Будимир се, у духу Француске антрополошке школе антике – иако је радио независно, па чак и пре њих – осврнуо и на другу врсту извора – на сликане вазе, потврдивши да сатири јесу полуљуди, полуживотиње, али да имају карактеристике коња – коњски реп, копита и фалус, а коњ је животиња за коју се веровало да инкарнира душе мртвих. Будимир истиче да је претерано велики фалус сатира директно повезан са комедијом и сатирском игром, тј. са смехом који је у овим драмским формама директно повезан са опсценошћу.<sup>41</sup> Осим тога, Будимир наглашава и то да је једно од Дионисових култних имена на Пелопонезу (одакле се и најстарија комедија преселила у Атику) било *Phallēn* тј. *Phallēs*, што он повезује са још једним култним именом – *Tauros*, које такође има значење фалуса. Али, пре него што пређем на тему смеха у Дионисовом култу, осврнућу се на коње

<sup>39</sup> Иста алтернација уочљива је у варијантама Дионисових имена – *Bakos/Bukhis*.

<sup>40</sup> Будимир 1969, 99-100.

<sup>41</sup> Burkert 2001, 3; Будимир, 1969, 101.

у контексту других Дионисових празника, попут Апатурија<sup>42</sup> и Антестерија, који су повезани са култом мртвих. Наиме, веровало се да за време ових свечаности душе мртвих посећују земљу на дивљим коњима.<sup>43</sup> Управо то је још један Будимиров аргумент за тезу да Дионисови сатири могу бити искључиво коњи или коњаници (душе мртвих).<sup>44</sup> Сатири су, дакле, повезани са празницима мртвих. Они су повезани са мртвима и са божанством смрти, али, истовремено, они су опсцена бића, која изазивају смех. На вазама су представљени као Дионисови пратиоци у друштву Менада, како плешу или свирају, пију док се не напију, славе у свакој врсти сласти и пожуде.<sup>45</sup> Живот у коме они живе окренут је наглавачке, нерегулисан је, имагинаран и утопијски, и представља супротност свим грађанским идеалима. Претерана опсценост сатира, која изазива смех, повезана је са њиховим карневалским начином представљања. Али какво место сатири имају у ритуалу? Они изазивају смех, а према Будимиру, као и према Чајкановићу, смех представља противотров за смрт и заштиту од њених демона.<sup>46</sup> Као што је раније речено, смех такође представља и

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<sup>42</sup> Празник Апатурија посвећен је младом вину, али и младим Атињанима који су управо тога дана постајали чланови заједнице зване *фратрија*.

<sup>43</sup> Будимир потврђује постојање везе између Диониса и коња и кроз етимологију имена овог божанства, побијајући аргументацију Кречмера (Kretschmer), према којој Дионисово име има значење “Зевсово дете” – *Dionisos*. Будимиров аргумент је дужина последњег слога у Дионисовом имену, што указује на стару балканску реч за коња – *damnos*, од *\*daunos* (*\*deu-*, *\*dau-* – “трчати”). Будимир, 1969, 115.

<sup>44</sup> *Исто*, 102. Лисараг (Lissarague) је кроз анализу репрезентација сатира на сликаним вазама дошао до закључка да се сатири увек крећу у групама (никада сами), што је једнако особено и за душе мртвих, које увек у групама долазе у посету живима, за време празника који су им посвећени. Lissarague 2000, 99.

<sup>45</sup> Beazley у *Apollo* III/IV, 1963-4, 3-14.

<sup>46</sup> Будимир 1969, 97.

најснажнију манифестацију живота, и у ритуалном контексту (какав је овај) смех је увек религијски мотивисан и оправдан.<sup>47</sup>

Истраживања Милана Будимира показала су да постоје два аспекта значајна за расветљавање порекла позоришта. Са једне стране, то су фалофорске процесције и ритуали који су повезани са доменом плодности, који – било да су везани за Диониса или Деметру – воде порекло од балканских староседелаца.<sup>48</sup> Друга култна димензија коју Будимир истиче јесте култ хероја, тј. култ мртвих. Имајући ово у виду, Будимир се фокусирао на античке текстове – и трагедије и комедије, као и на текстове који се на њих односе. Поред чувене Аристотелове дефиниције, према којој комедија представља “веселу трагедију”, Будимир је такође скренуо пажњу на Теофрастову дефиницију, према којој се трагедија бави херојем и његовим патњама. Оно што Будимир истиче, то је да се херој првобитно јавља у култу, а тек касније у епском контексту, истичући такође и пример Херакла, који јесте херој, али и лик који се појављује и у трагедији и у комедији. Анализирајући две Еурипидове трагедије – *Алkestиду* и *Херакла*, Будимир истиче да обе драме више личе на сатирску игру него на трагедију. У *Алkestиди*, главна јунакиња одлучује да умре уместо свог мужа (чије понашање нимало није херојско), али се трагедија завршава срећно, након што пијани Херакле спаси Алkestиду. Ово је један од аргумената које Будимир користи да докаже порекло трагедије из сатирске игре и везу позоришта и култа који уједињује тугу и смех.

Узевши у обзир све ове аргументе, Будимир се враћа на Аристотелову дефиницију трагедије и комедије тврдећи да оне имају заједничко порекло у култу Диониса, и да једна представља “озбиљну”, а друга “веселу” или како то Олга Фреиденберг каже – “пародијску” варијанту. Будући да се и

<sup>47</sup> Чајкановић 1994, I, 292-314.

<sup>48</sup> Још је Херодот тврдио да су Грци преузели фалофорске процесције од Пелазга. Будимир 1969, 128.

трагедије и комедије изводе у државној институцији (а античко позориште јесте било једна од демократских институција, и сви грађани били су у обавези да га посећују), и једна и друга контролисане су од стране државе. Будимир такође подсећа на Сократову изјаву (у Платоновој *Гозби*) да добар драмски писац мора да буде професионалац и једнако изврстан писац и комедија и трагедија.<sup>49</sup>

Поред овога, значајан допринос Милана Будимира у домену античке драме јесте и то што је указао на чињеницу на коју се заборавља када се говори о катарзи: катарза је чишћење нечистоће која је ритуална, на шта је указао и сам Аристотел. Будимир несумњиво доказује ритуално порекло античког позоришта, као и то да саме драме – комедија, трагедија и сатирска игра (трагедије и сатирске игре писане су од стране истог аутора и извођене су увек у комбинацији од три трагедије и једне сатирске игре) имају за циљ да суоче гледаоце са силама живота и смрти, водећи их кроз катарзу, до слављења и афирмације живота.<sup>50</sup>

На крају, поред позоришта, које је успело да институционализује и на тај начин надзире смрт и смех, остао је још један, ненадзирани и тешко контролисани домен који их спаја, а то је црни хумор, који најочигледније место у антици проналази на духовитим епитафима или у некој другој врсти епиграма са тематиком смрти.<sup>51</sup> Овај амалгам смрти и смеха упућује на закључак да се црни хумор бави свим оним што је

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<sup>49</sup> Платон, *Гозба*, 223д.

<sup>50</sup> Највероватније је да су се дешавања на Градским Дионизијама у класичној Атини одвијала следећим редоследом: првог дана су била два такмичења у извођењу дитирамба – једно у коме су учествовали младићи, а друго у коме су у се такмичили одрасли Атињани (из сваког племена по један представник); другог дана је у конкуренцији било пет комедија, док су последња три дана била посвећена трагедији – три ансамбла наступала су са по три трагедије и једном сатирском драмом.

<sup>51</sup> Црни хумор је тема десетог поглавља књиге.

„гротескно, морбидно и застрашујуће”.<sup>52</sup> У наредном делу текста нисам се искључиво бавила односом према смрти (и животу) у антици, већ ми је намера била и да побijeм широко распрострањено мишљење да је црни хумор америчка инвенција касних педесетих, шездесетих или раних седамдесетих година прошлог века, а према другима – европска креација тридесетих. У студији о књижевности и црном хумору шездесетих година (*Black Humor Fiction in the Sixties*), Макс Шулц (Max Schulz) тврди да се црни хумор појавио у САД за време опадања традиционалних вредности.<sup>53</sup> Дефинишући црни хумор као америчку врсту хумора, Конрад Книккенбоккер (Konrad Knickerbocker) га истовремено карактерише као “ужасан” и “чаробан”.<sup>54</sup> У овом кључу теоретичари описују црни хумор као модерни феномен, тврдећи да представља кулминацију књижевног модернизма и почетак постмодерне. Друга струја претпоставља да порекло црног хумора треба тражити у европској традицији француског надреализма. Наиме, Андре Бретон (André Breton) је био тај који је сковао фразу *humor noir*, и окарактерисао га као бунтован, иконокластичан хумор, који преиспитује друштвене норме. Моја теза је да, иако идиом *црни хумор* без сумње представља иновацију XX века, црни хумор није настао у “софистицираној” књижевности или филмовима Европе и Америке двадесетог века, већ да је постојао још у грчкој антици, и то не искључиво код комедиографа и писаца попут Аристофана, већ да припада и фолклорној традицији и ритуалу. Као што сам у претходном делу овог рада показала, несумњиво је да је жанр комедије тесно и инхерентно повезан са ритуалом. Моја тврдња да црни хумор мора бити ритуално оправдан, или барем дозвољен, стоји у вези са чињеницом да је табу везан за смрт толико јак да би свакако спречио било какво понашање или шале који нису ритуално очекивани, или барем

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<sup>52</sup> Pratt 1993, xix.

<sup>53</sup> Schulz 1981, 271-272.

<sup>54</sup> Knickerbocker 1964, секција 7, 3.

дозвољени. Уосталом, поред тога што су добро расположење и смех били (па и данас остали) незаобилазни део погребног ритуала, о чему је већ било речи, веза између овог обреда и црног хумора неоспорна је и због чињенице да се бројни епиграми са црнихуморном тематиком у антици често налазе као натписи на надгробним споменицима.

Хумор на овим епитафима може се дефинисати као гротескан, ироничан и саркастичан.<sup>55</sup> Иако је повезан са мртвима и са смрћу, овај хумор је често политички и друштвено ангажован. Пример који следи представља најстарије сведочанство које ћу цитирати и датира се у период између друге половине VI и прве половине V в. п. н. е.

Пошто сам много тога попио, много појео  
и изрекао много ружних речи  
почивам овде ја, Тимокреон Рођанин.<sup>56</sup>

Овај Симонидов епитаф о Тимокреону написан елегијским метром, бави се Тимокреоновим слабостима, али говори о њима у маниру у коме се хвале његове атлетске или војничке врлине, што је за епитафе било уобичајно. Иако, наизглед, Симонид исмева свог некадашњег пријатеља, он заправо говори и нешто истинито о њему, што није заклоњено уобичајеним и формалним хвалама и претеривањима. Али, да ли је то једина интерпретација овог духовитог епиграма? Семантичком анализом надгробних споменика у античкој Грчкој бавио се Јаспер Свенбро (Jasper Svenbro), који је дошао до закључка да сваки пут када пролазник прочита натпис на

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<sup>55</sup> Тема црног хумора појављује се и у филозофској литератури. У Платоновом *Федону*, филозофи који тврде да су заљубљени у смрт, заправо се боје умирања. На другом месту стоји како се плаше смрти када је ветровито, пошто верују да ветар може да одува њихове душе. Плато, *Федон*, 64а-б.

<sup>56</sup> *Greek Anthology* 7.348, Атенеј, *Гозба софиста*, 10.415, *Simonid* 37 у Page's 1981, *EG* 167.

<http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/january.pdf>

надгробном споменику, он заправо призива мртве, оживљава њих и њихову славу (*kleos*), идеал коме је сваки смртник тежио.<sup>57</sup> (Овде не треба заборавити на чињеницу да је у антици постојало искључиво читање наглас.<sup>58</sup>) Свенброва интерпретација наглашава да читање наглас омогућава да слава поново оживи. У том смислу, овај епитаф иронизује и исмева не само мртвог који одређене врлине није стекао, већ истовремено преиспитује концепт *славе* (*kleos-a*), као и то који су квалитети потребни да би се она стекла и да би човек био друштвено

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<sup>57</sup> Svenbro 1993, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Упркос несумњивом постојању писмености у антици, ова култура је пре свега била орална. Наиме, сваки писани текст, као и књиге, читали су се искључиво наглас, а писани документи и закони служили су искључиво томе да допуне постојеће традиционалне неписане норме. То је био разлог што су многи грчки и латински текстови писани без размака између речи, које су тек читањем наглас добијале свој облик, док су у тишини остајале тешко распознаљиве. Читање у себи појављује се у антици тек спорадично, и један од најчувенијих примера везан је за спиритуалност и религиозну посвећеност миланског бискупа Амброзија, о којој је писао св. Августин. Августин, *Исповести* 6, 3. У сваком случају, ова особеност античког акустичног читања, које се није доживљавало кроз визуелизацију, директно је повезана са одсуством саморефлексије и писане спекулативне мисли, која се текстуализује први пут тек код Платона, (појавивши се претходно у усменој форми код Сократа, са открићем сопства). Па ипак, то не значи да је од Платоновог времена постојало читање у себи, какво је особено за савремено доба. Наиме, Платон у Протагори (325.e) говори о томе да су се деца описмењавала тако што су учила добре песнике напамет. Ово се не разликује од средњовековног концепта “фонетске писмености”, где је способност читања служила томе да се текстови (молитве и одломци из светих књига) науче напамет и изговоре, без способности разумевања текста који се чита у тишини. Читање у себи појавило се тек у касном средњем веку, и то као последица промене технике писања, тј. увођења интерпункције и размака. Саенгер сматра да је управо напуштање акустичног читања отворило простор за развој скептицизма и индивидуалног критичког мишљења. О писмености у антици види Havelock 1991 и Thomas 1992, а о значају и начину промене стила читања, а тиме и мишљења, види Saenger 1997.

признаг. Апсурд се интензивира у контексту црног хумора, у нераскидивом споју живота и смрти.

Још снажнија иронизација доминантних херојских идеала,<sup>59</sup> ратничког дискурса и односа државе према војсковођама и палим борцима види се из епитафа Алкеја из Месене, посвећеног Филипу V:

Алкеј:

О путниче! Неоплакани и несахрањени, лежимо овде,

на тесалском брегу, нас 30 000, велика туга Македоније.

Филип, бестидна духа и окретнији од јелена, оставио нас је овде.

Филип:

О путниче! Неолајана, без и једног листића Мотка је подигнута на задњици Алкејевој.

(Алкеј из Месене, *Greek Anthology*, 7. 247)<sup>60</sup>

Већина црнихуморних шала којима сам се у књизи бавила тиче се друштвене стварности и на њу реагује. Овај аспект црног хумора открива своју тесну везу са реалним животом, кроз смену реалности и екстремних метафизичких истина. Заправо, чињеница да се спомињу крај живота и суочавање са смрћу дају црном хумору моћ да се супротстави било чему и било коме. „Фокусиран на раздвајање и крај, црни хумор никада не може бити наиван и погрешан“ (Фелдман).<sup>61</sup> У томе лежи разлог што шале и хумор заправо представљају изузетно озбиљну ствар, омогућавајући људима да се суоче и да

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<sup>59</sup> Концептом херојске, тј. лепе смрти, као и концептом ужасне смрти, бавила сам се у II поглављу ове монографије.

<sup>60</sup> *Greek Anthology* 7. 247, Види Плутарх, *Фламиније*.  
<http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/january.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Feldman 1993, 106.

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освоје, барем на тренутак, неку врсту моћи, превазилазећи осећај беспомоћности пред социјалном неправдом, исмевајући преваранте и оне који купују њихове услуге, освајајући моћ над политичарима и војсковођама. Он омогућава суочавање и изношење на видело људских слабости, таштнине и похлепе. Хумор, а посебно црни, поништава моћ свих егзистенцијалних тешкоћа и саме смрти, свдећи живот на апсурд, али истовремено укузујући и на његову вредност. И управо овај апсурд изазива смех који је у античком погребном ритуалу и фоклору, несумњиво, имао само једну функцију – да оснажи и подржи живот.



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