

Evj Johanne Håland

Bergen

Norvège

evyhaa@online.no

UDK 393:291

291.213:159.9

159.942:29

Professional paper

Received: December 7, 2010

Accepted: December 17, 2010

Emotion and Identity in Connection with Greek Death-Cult, Modern and Ancient

The article examines emotion and identity in connection with Greek death-cult in an attempt to clarify certain contemporary political phenomena in the Mediterranean area. The cult of the dead is a common cultural pattern in the area. Why is this cult so persistent? What is death-cult and how does it manifest itself? The article delves into its lasting importance in the Greek part of the cultural area, where the author has conducted several fieldworks. To illustrate the persistence of this cultural pattern, the characteristic aspects connected with death-cult in Greek tradition are discussed: The comparison is based on festivals, which are dedicated to deceased persons and domestic death-rituals combined with ancient sources. Based on them an analytical survey of the relationship between the death-cult dedicated to deceased mediators in ancient and modern society, as it is manifested through laments, burials and the following memorial rituals is made. The modern domestic rituals people perform for their own dead influence the official ideological rituals, and vice versa, the domestic rituals reflect public performances. A study of modern cult practices reveals many parallels with the official cult of the ancients, and suggests ways in which modern rituals can throw new light upon the ancient rituals and vice versa. The article seeks to demonstrate how new ideologies must adjust to older rituals and beliefs and how public and domestic rituals are connected. The article finally suggests how these similarities might represent a common way of expression within a larger context in which the Mediterranean cultural meaning of emotion is central.

Keywords: emotion, identity, death-cult, burial customs, Greece

Introduction

Before the most recent Balkan war, in 1988, the coffin of Knez Lazar was carried on a pilgrimage through every village in Serbia followed by weeping and mourning people

600 years after his defeat at Kosovo Polje.¹ On the southern shore of the Mediterranean area, the death-cult is also important, manifested by the continuous fights over the tombs of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron (cf. Cuffel 2008). The most important festival of the Shī'a is centred around the death of Husain, grandson of the Prophet. During this festival it is of greatest importance to make a pilgrimage to Husain's tomb in Kerbela, in Iraq. Saddam Hussein did not permit them to do this. His ban however, was not new, since people already several centuries earlier were forbidden to make pilgrimages to Husain's tomb, so one may ask if Saddam Hussein's move illustrates lack of historical knowledge: As early as 850, the Caliph found it political necessary to level Husain's tomb and to prohibit pilgrimages to Kerbela. But government intervention proved of little effect and the rebuilt grave has remained to this day the devotional center for pilgrims from all over the Shī'a world. It is of particular popularity to be buried by the sanctuary, since they will surely enter Paradise (cf. Grunebaum 1981). In the neighbouring country, the anniversary of Khomeini's death still draws huge crowds. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Shī'a were permitted to make pilgrimages to Kerbela again, as we could observe at the TV in 2003. The death-cult is also found in more northern areas: in the autumn of 1990 people went in procession through the streets of Leningrad carrying pictures of the last tsar. Perhaps they had his pictures in their homes and paid devotion to him in the intervening years as well? After the collapse of communism, we have seen that different religious rituals have continued secretly, in the same way that similar rituals continued among Greeks living beyond the Greek borders and later in Greece. They were not public, since they were opposed by the Church of Greece who regarded them as pagan, in more recent times they have generally been permitted.

The death-cult seems to have potential political significance from the Balkans across the Mediterranean area and the Middle East, but this pattern is not a modern development. We meet similar conditions both in ancient and modern Greece, since the head of *Agios* (Saint) Andreas resides in his church in the town Patras in the Peloponnese, where he is patron saint. The head was in Rome in the period 1460–1963 because Thomas Palaiologos brought it with him when he fled. The fight over the

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper at the 9th International conference Social Context of Death, Dying and Disposal, *Emotion and Identity in Death, Dying and Disposal*, University of Durham (DDD9), September 2009 and a shorter and somehow different version, Greek death-cult, modern and ancient. A comparison of a Mediterranean and Balkan cultural pattern is published in *Venets: The Belogradchik Journal for Local History, Cultural Heritage and Folk Studies* 1/2 2010. Most of the material is from a book-length manuscript on Greek Death-cult, modern and ancient. The topics discussed in the following are also examined in Håland 2004, 2008a. It is not my intention to make an argument about the historical development of the death-cult in Greece here, but compare the modern and ancient Greek death-cult, i.e. a case of structural history or comparative statics (see also Kjeldstadli 1994). However, we have ample evidence for death-cult in the intermediary the Byzantine and later periods in Greece, see also Alexiou 2002; Håland 2007a. For the veneration of the dead in Serbia, see for example Pavićević 2008 and 2009 (also for the recent cult of Milošević). For an interesting example from the Soviet era, see Morinis 1992: 4: provincial Russians who bring their newborn babies for the blessing of contact with Lenin's Tomb in Red Square. The importance of providing for the dead is also illustrated in Gustafsson 2009. Similar cults can be found in the Americas, Asia and Africa, the scope of this article however, does not cover these areas.

bones of *Ag. Andreas* being 500 years in Rome, parallels the fight over and manipulation with the bones of ancient heroes as Theseus (Hdt. 1.67 f.; Plut. *Thes.* 36.1), Orestes (Paus. 3.3,7) and Hektor.² The importance of the bones of Joseph for the Israelites parallel both the coffin of Lazar and the reliquaries carried in procession in modern Greece. Another parallel is the *Epitaphios* (Christ's funeral) found in every single Orthodox Church, and which is carried in procession every Good Friday and sometimes immersed into the sea, again paralleling the annual burial procession with the death-bed of Adonis in ancient Greece and Egypt (Theoc. *Id.* 15.132–142). Will a closer examination of the modern Greek death-cult in comparison with its ancient parallel clarify these contemporary political phenomena in the Mediterranean area?

In order to investigate this problem, the article examines emotion and identity in connection with Greek death-cult. The cult of the dead represents a common cultural pattern in the area, from Portugal in the west to Iran in the east. It is also found in the Balkan countries and Russia. Why is this cult so persistent? What is death-cult and how does it manifest itself? The following will discuss its lasting importance in the Greek part of the cultural area, where I have conducted fieldworks since the beginning of the 1980s.³ To illustrate the persistence of this cultural pattern, and hoping to show that these similarities reveal a common way of expression within a larger context, the characteristic aspects connected with death-cult in Greek tradition are discussed: The comparison is based on festivals, which are dedicated to deceased persons and domestic death-rituals combined with ancient sources. Based on them an analytical survey of the relationship between the death-cult dedicated to deceased mediators in ancient and modern society, as it is manifested through the ritual laments, the mourning, the wake, the treatment of the corpse, the burial procession, the burial and the following memorial rituals when people dedicate offerings to the dead is made. The comparison then, seeks to illustrate ways in which modern rituals can throw new light upon the ancient rituals and vice versa. In general, I go from the modern to the ancient cases, i.e. foregrounding the field observations of modern death-rituals, before I move on to the ancient material. To avoid unnecessary repetitions however, I sometimes deal with the ancient parallels in connection with the modern material and vice versa.

² *Il.* 24.793; Dowden 1989: 51–53. Denzey 2007 provides an interesting parallel when documenting how the remains of venerated holy women were moved from sacred space that had been founded, patronized and inhabited by women into a space controlled by male church officials, i.e. from the Roman catacombs to populate the aboveground basilicas with relics.

³ Since 1983, I have had several periods of fieldwork in the Mediterranean, mainly in Greece where I have also been conducting research on religious festivals since 1990. A sixth months period of fieldwork was also conducted on religious festivals in Italy in 1987, cf. Håland 1990. The problems and fruitfulness of working with anthropological comparative approaches (such as using material from Modern Greek civilisation as models) to Ancient Society are discussed in Håland 2007a, cf. further Winkler 1990. For the recent debates about Mediterranean Studies as a discipline, see particularly Horden and Purcell 2000; Harris 2005.

Death-cult

In the Greek cultural environment, the death-cult combines the cult of dead family-members and “great persons” through dedications of offerings and the performance of prayers at their tombs. Both the cult of newly deceased persons and formerly dead heroes (Hes. *Op.* 654f. ; Paus. 1.36,3) or heroines (Paus. 1.43,4 f., 8.35,8) bear witness to a *death-cult*.⁴ We meet this phenomenon both in ancient and modern Greek society. The death-cult for holy men and women, is apparent in the ancient cult of heroes, the modern practice of sainthood in Christian areas, the Turkish Mevlāna, and the *marabouts* (holy men) in North-Africa, which suggests that it is related to fundamental beliefs, or long lasting *mentalities* in the Mediterranean.⁵ Ancestor-worship is the worship or propitiation of the ancestors. Hero or heroine-worship, and the later cult of the saints is the worship, cult or propitiation of a deceased important man or woman. The phenomenon called death-cult is an important key to most of the religious festivals in Greece. The reason is that the festivals are often annual memorials and celebrations dedicated to a deceased guardian of society. This guardian is a mediator between human beings and the supernatural within the hierarchical structure that constitute the polytheistic-polydaimonistic society, in the same way as he or she often functioned when still alive, within the human society.

The ancient Greeks believed that the various agonistic festivals derived from commemorations dedicated to great men or women. To mention one example, the Parparonia festival in Sparta was dedicated to the god, Zeus, but the festival also needed a hero. We meet the same pattern at the Panathenaia dedicated to Athena, because death-cults both in the *Agora* (market place) and on the Acropolis were of major importance in connection with the cult of the goddess. Traditional scholarship, for example Noel Robertson has focused principally on the cult dedicated to the earth-born Erichthonios/Erechtheus.⁶ Nevertheless, several heroines were also important in connection with the festival, such as Pandrosos and Aglauros. All the agonistic festivals in ancient Greece had their own hero, because they were traced back to some mythical death and burial, i.e. festival games originated as funeral games for heroes. The rituals re-enacted the ceremonies conducted at the burials and memorial celebrations for a deceased hero. The same picture emerges when we consider the Pan-Hellenic festivals and lesser local festivals, although the connections are more obscure. A putative tomb was a prerequisite for the festival site, and blood-offerings were made in honour of the heroes at the altar that was of central importance in the cult of the *hero*, a person who lived long ago and was still honoured (Loraux 1981a: 492). This dead

⁴ Accordingly, I do not follow Ekroth 1999, who, in her study of sacrificial rituals questions the view that the rituals of hero-cults are to be considered as originating in the cult of the dead. For an extended discussion, see Håland 2004: 566, 2008a. Cf. for example, Alexiou 1990; Psychogiou 2008. For the cult of the dead, see also Burkert 1985: 190-194; Georgoudi 1988.

⁵ For a different position, see Brown 1982: ch. 1. Eickelman 1981: 10-13 discusses the marabout vs. official Islam.

⁶ Robertson 1992: ch. 8. Neither does he discuss Hera's games in Olympia initiated by Hippodameia, Paus. 5.16,2-4.

person was the wielder of a magical influence. Like the dead heroines (Paus. 9.17,4-6), he was also a mediator between even stronger powers in the underworld, who were responsible for the fruits of the earth. It was of great importance to manipulate these powers for the benefit of the living world.

Since this pattern can also be found in the modern religious festivals dedicated to dead persons, such festivals are connected with a cult of the dead, and may be referred to as *death-festivals*. Today, for example, blood-offerings are still made to the earth via the dead saints, *Agios Kōnstantinos* and *Agia* (Saint) Elenē, just before the grain harvest (Håland 2005, 2007a, 2008a and b).

Death-rituals and festivals

Death-rituals are first and foremost “rites de passage” (cf. Van Gennep 1909; Danforth 1982), and the Greek death-rituals very often seem quite foreign, bizarre and “exotic” to people from the North of Europe and the U.S. The difference between a familiar “us” and an exotic “them” is a central barrier to achieving a meaningful understanding of the world of the Other. The actual obstacle, however, can be overcome if we are willing to participate in the world of the Other (cf. Danforth 1982: 5). This can be done through fieldwork.

I have conducted fieldworks on modern religious festivals, which are dedicated to deceased persons and domestic death-rituals. Among the festivals on which I have worked, we find the two most important Pan-Hellenic death-festivals. As the important ritual celebrated on 15 August, is called *Ē Koimēsis tēs Theotokou* (the Dormition [i.e. “sleep”] of the Mother of God), the Greek name of the festival already suggests the death perspective (cf. Alexiou 2002). The Virgin’s death or “Dormition” is followed by her burial or the “9th day’s ritual of the *Panagia*” (the Virgin Mary) on 23 August, thus, reflecting ordinary death-rituals and the following memorial service. We encounter the same phenomenon in the Orthodox Easter festival, dedicated to the “Death and Resurrection of Christ”. Also, among the ancient festivals, we encounter two festivals that are particularly connected with death-cult, the *Adōnia*, dedicated to the vegetation god Adonis, and the Dionysian *Anthesteria* which was also the festival of the ancestors, when the spirits of dead returned temporarily. Several of the Demetrian festivals are also connected with death-cult.

Greek religious festivals are most commonly dedicated to one or another dead person, or, in the case of the ancient festivals, to a dead person together with a god (dess), often a vegetation god (dess). Accordingly, these festivals illustrate the importance of popular beliefs connected with fertility cult, death-cult and healing for the preservation of the official ideology, in ancient and modern society.⁷ The three cults are connected

⁷ Håland 2007a: ch. 6, 2008a also for the following.

with the domestic or female sphere, which is an important cultural theme in the Mediterranean where we find differentiated spheres and roles of men and women.

Many studies have been occupied with the role of women in ancient Greece. It should be stated that when we talk about ancient Greek culture's appreciation of women, we must unfortunately rely mainly on the opinion we find in the male-produced sources of the culture, written as well as visual, since most of our sources are created by men. Almost all of the female individuals are presented through what others, i.e. the male authors of our sources say about them. This means that we possess only half of the story. Is it possible to amend this drawback and if so, how? Is it possible to learn something about women through men's descriptions?

The way ancient male authors of sources, such as Hesiod, Aristotle, Plutarch and late-antique Christian writers, consider women and their behaviour is strikingly similar to the modern Greek and Mediterranean ideology connected with *honour and shame*, which reflects conventional male values (cf. Gilmore 1987).⁸ According to these values, gender relations in society are spatially divided, and the most characteristic aspect of the code seems to be the association of these concepts with gender roles, power and sexuality. Representing the ideal of a patriarchal ideology, these values are reproduced by fieldworkers who are introduced to them by their own informants, most often males. The works of these male and often female ethnographers have been used by several scholars working with ancient women, such as Peter Walcot (1970, 1999) who compares the modern and ancient material. These male values are also strikingly similar to the values found in the works written by most of the Western scholars who describe ancient Greek women, and who take a more cautious view of comparisons with the modern Mediterranean material, such as Sarah B. Pomeroy (1998: 9 f.). The ancient sources Pomeroy uses, are all written by men, and they have the same principal view: They are males who subscribe to the same androcentric ideology connected with "honour and shame". Although Pomeroy is cautious about using modern material comparatively, one may argue that her presentation suggests that the entire culture can be reduced to these two values. Thus, by taking the statements of ancient male authors of sources about women literally, as she does, I do not think it is possible to find out about "flesh-and-blood women in the ancient world", as she attempts to do. She is in fact, and probably unconsciously, adopting the male Western ethnographic researcher's reading of the Mediterranean sources by her one-sided presentation of the ancient male-produced sources and their values. These sources should be compared with modern Mediterranean reality from a female perspective, to see if the extremely negative bias could be nuanced or changed. Even if Greek women may subscribe to the male ideological model of "honour and shame", they have their own values in addition to, or running contrary to the male view, depending on how the male view suits their own thinking. Ancient sources written by men often criticise women's "female knowledge". Male authored texts describe women as

⁸ The honour and shame dichotomy has been questioned by a number of scholars. Horden and Purcell 2000 return to it as a defining social characteristic. Herzfeld 1992 is one who questions it. See Håland 2007a: ch. 2 for discussion

having roles different than those of men, as reacting to war and family crises differently than men; ancient medical texts grant women a very different biology and recognize that women have medical problems that men do not have. What is obviously difficult to discern from ancient texts is women's understanding of those roles attributed to them by men simply because women experience the world differently from men. Based on the values of modern Greek women, this understanding may be called *a poetics of womanhood* (cf. Dubisch 1995: ch. 10), the point of which is to show how *to be good at being a woman*, for example when performing fertility-rituals in agricultural or procreation contexts, using magic in healing contexts, nursing children, or performing death-rituals. Modern and ancient women have the same symbolic categories, and they may draw on a range of cultural materials when performing their womanhood, such as the meanings related to the female body, motherhood, sexuality and to women's general activities in the religious sphere. Among important ways of manifesting "a poetics of womanhood" are through "emotion and suffering", "female ways", "the power of woman in the maintenance of society". In reality, these performances are difficult to manifest in the context of "honour and shame", since this code claims that women's roles generally are domestic, "private" and unofficial; their identity is less problematic and not earned or actively demonstrated and they are not engaged in the sort of public struggles their men-folk are. The very idea of a public "performance" of women seems antithetical to the cultural male rules for appropriate female behaviour. The reality, however, is far from the male wishful thinking, since women "perform" womanhood, sometimes in very public ways, for example during festivals and funerals.

I have located two contradictory views in ancient and modern male-produced sources. By comparing them with the few sources we possess from ancient women and the values found in present-day society's female sphere, I have realized that the actual contradictory views present one value-system connected with the female sphere and another connected with the male sphere.

The rituals surrounding death have a very emotional nature. Death-rituals, i.e. funerals and the special rites, which are performed in connection with special commemorative celebrations, are the most difficult to cope with of the "crises of life", and to study death-rituals is, the study of people in grief which, of course, might be a universal emotion. Emotion and pain however are particularly related to the Mediterranean where we have a continuing tradition of laments.⁹

It is important to understand the Mediterranean cultural meaning of emotion, which is different from the traditional Western ideological focus on suppressing and hiding emotions and suffering.¹⁰ From Plato to the modern age, women have been thought to be more emotional than men, and emotion is generally linked to women's lament (Holst-Warhaft 1992: 29 ff.), since laments are intended to arouse

⁹ Alexiou 1974; Seremetakis 1991; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Psychogiou 2008; Suter 2008.

¹⁰ For a discussion of gender and emotion particularly in connection with death, see Håland 2007a: ch. 6, cf. also Lutz/Abu-Lughod 1990; Holst-Warhaft 1992: ch. 1.

an emotional response in the listener. In relation to gender, behaviour, emotions, gestures and rituals are important, and these all-important Mediterranean ways of expression—illustrated by, for example death-rituals—are usually unknown to persons from the North of Europe and the U.S. Nevertheless, in the Mediterranean environment this “body language”, i.e. ritual or performative mode of communication is as important as the verbal communication and particularly related to death-cult (see also Håland 2008).

The modern domestic rituals people perform for their own dead reflect the public performances. The modern cult practices reveals many parallels with the official cult of the ancients, we also meet similar conditions in our scattered sources telling about the domestic death-cult. Accordingly, the following will present a burial from the village of Pyrgos Dirou, Inner Mani on the southern part of the Mani peninsula in the Peloponnese, which I witnessed in October 1992, and compare this and other modern rituals with ancient sources to see how they might clarify ancient death-cult through a comparison with ancient sources.

Female laments and male burials

The ritual laments belong to the burial, which is the most often visited of the life-cycle passages. When the death has “arrived”, and the deceased is washed, dressed and “laid out” on the bier with the face turned towards the east, the women start the ritual lamentation. The laments are sung by the women of the house and the closest neighbouring women, often professional lamenters, while swaying their bodies rhythmically. The magical laments are divided into three stages. They are sung at the traditional wake in the house before the burial, during the burial procession and at the tomb. Afterwards, laments are sung at fixed intervals.

The laments constitute a ritual which is considered as a social duty in most villages, and the lamenters arrive automatically as soon as a person has died without being invited by the family of the deceased.

The dead is buried between twelve and twenty-four hours after death. In Mani the deceased is buried from his home of childhood, although he has lived in another village during his entire adult life. The courtyard is filled up with visitors. In the living room, the dead high school teacher Kōnstantinos Nik. Poilantzas rests adorned in the coffin: he wears a costume, his hands are folded and joined on the chest, a candle is placed in-between. As in antiquity, the contemporary deceased also receives a coin on his forehead or in his mouth. People might still send messages to their own dead by way of the deceased. So, letters, flowers, fruits, nuts and herbs are thrown on the corps, who carries these gifts to the next world. At his wrist is an icon picturing the *Panagia*. Here are also yellow-brown pilgrim-candles, which are gifts from the lamenting women. The other gifts, handkerchiefs and money are placed on the dead followed by embraces and kisses on the forehead. Lighted candles are placed

around the coffin towards the right. The laments which are sung around the dead, are “passed” in the same direction, as with everything else which are passed around the corpse, such as the censer at intervals, food or drinks. When the body is laid out for burial, the clothes must be without knots and the coat unbuttoned. Knots and buttons are the contrary of untying which is the desired effect of the death. They wake the dead body the whole night before the burial.

The 34 lamenting women sitting around the coffin of the dead are lead by the widow of the deceased. When singing about his life from childhood to his death, they perform the female part of the death-ritual which lasts the whole night until 3 o'clock the following afternoon, when the wake reaches its peak: the great lament. Now, the priests arrive and the male part of the burial starts. But the women have not finished their ritual and continue their lamentation, as if nothing happens, and the priests have to wait in the yard, until they finished their ritual.

The content of the laments is traditional, such as questions to the deceased. The laments might start with the dead saying farewell to the closest relatives. They may also include threats. The laments represent a link between the living and the dead, and might give a social comment to the rest of the world. They might comprise a protest against the official Christianity and its views of a rewarding afterlife for the pious (Caraveli 1986: 184). They often deal with the fate. The laments are handed down through the generations, particularly from mother to daughter. We meet many sources to the popular beliefs concerning the afterlife. The laments illustrate the continuity of pre-Christian patterns, since we meet many themes from the ancient grave-inscriptions. They often attach social change; they protest against the new religion, and its promise about an eternal life as a reward for the pious is considered a lie. They also protest against modern medical doctors. As at the tombs of Dareios or Agamemnon in the ancient world, the contemporary laments might also be a sort of exorcism or necromancy when the deceased is demanded: “Up, my love, rise! Rise and talk to me”.¹¹ An ancient parallel is the mother crying bitterly on the tomb of her young daughter, invoking the soul of her daughter, who died before her wedding day (AP. 7.486), as did also Sophocles’ *Antigone* (Soph. *Ant.* 806-820, 860 ff., 891-928).

The women start by lamenting the deceased, then, they lament their own dead, as the women in the modern village of Olympos on the island of Karpathos in southern Greece during the Easter celebration (see *infra*). The lament starts in a repetitive way, and ends most often by lamenting the condition of the lamenter. It is the lamenter not the deceased who is in the center of the story, like the dirge of Cassandra in Aeschylus (*Ag.* 1322-1326, 1341), singing her own dirge as she goes to her death

¹¹ Cf. Caraveli 1986: 181-186, particularly 184 f. and Eur. *El.* 678-681; Aesch. *Cho.* 456-461, *Pers.* 619 (657)-681, 687 f. A man was taken by death too early and left behind an infant child. But the son is shown respect, in memory of his father’s name, AP. 7.659. In one’s grief one might protest about everything: *Does Charidas lie beneath you? If you mean The son of Arimmas of Kyrene – yes. Charidas, what’s it like down there? Great darkness. And resurrection? A lie. And Pluto? A fable. Then we are finished...* What I’m saying is the truth. If you want to hear something pleasant, the cost of living is very low in Hades, AP. 7.524 (tr. Peter Jay).

(Ag. 1345),¹² while the modern lamenter generally laments her own fate, having lost a loved one through death. During the performance of the laments the women are swaying their bodies rhythmically, beating their breasts and scarifying their cheeks, while tearing their hair. Until recently they might also cut their hair to cover the face of the deceased, as during the mourning for Patroklos in the *Iliad* (23.135 f.,151). For those who sing laments, they may be the reordering of the woman's inner emotional reactions to death into a tangible outward expression.

A light is lit so the deceased may find his way to the next world. The doors and windows are shut, to prevent Death from leaving the house. A person from the household invokes Death asking him to leave the deceased, to prevent Death from taking another in the household.

As in ancient Greece, the death-rituals in contemporary Mani are related to the household, while burials are associated with the public world, represented by the church. The opposition between the ritual lament and the wake (*klama*) and the burial (*kēdeia*) might be understood as a contemporary version of the former tension between ancestor cult and central churches in Mani (Seremetakis 1991). One may also mention the ancient powerful families and their cults against which both the ancient legislators and later the classical *polis* (city-state) struggled. They also struggled against a female way of expression which gave women a considerable power over the rituals of death.

When the termination of the ritual lament in Mani draws near, some of the women fetch the symbols to be used during the blessing of the priest. Then the priests enter, followed by the closest male part of the family of the deceased, primarily his two sons who have returned back home from Thessaloniki and Athens respectively. When they enter the room, the women get up, and their lament is literally cut "all through". The priests start the official ritual, which terminates when one of them dip a twig of basil in a glass of water and blesses the people being present. The glass of water and the candles around the coffin might be compared with the *lēkythoi* (vases) which were put around the bed of the deceased in antiquity, their purpose probably being to purify the dead and the living.

Now starts the burial procession from the house of the deceased to the church dedicated to the *Panagia* where the burial rituals take place. In the procession the musicians are followed by the man carrying the wreath dedicated by the high school where the deceased worked as a teacher. Another man carries the coffin-lid. Then follow the priests and seven men carrying the open coffin. Behind follows a woman carrying a plate with *kollyva*, a mixture of wheat, nuts and fruit, which is usually offered to the dead during the memorial services at the tombs. Following is a woman carrying a bottle of water, a towel, plastic drinking cups, plastic spoons and several bottles of metaxa. Another woman carries a bunch of candles and an icon depicting the *Panagia*. As the funeral procession slowly moves through the village, new mourners

¹² Holst-Warhaft 1992: 140 f. discusses Cassandra's lament. Concerning the following she (110) also comments that a mourner not close to the dead will focus on her private suffering to acquire the necessary pain.

join up. Several stop and greet the deceased. At the chapel, at the outskirts of Pyrgos, more people are waiting. The procession with the coffin and the closest family enter the church towards the right.

The coffin is placed in front of the *iconostasis*. While the priests perform the burial rituals, people file into the church, light candles and kiss the icon at the entrance door. The candles which were carried in the procession are distributed. People light the candles from each other as during the Resurrection service, on Easter Sunday. But, here in Pyrgos, the candles are soon extinguished, and recollected. Then, a priest incenses the whole congregation. The priest's ritual sermon is followed by a number of men performing orations over the dead person, talking about his public life, and particularly about all the donations he had given to the church, thus paralleling the ancient liturgies (*leitourgiai*) or "services for the people". Afterwards, the ceremony in the church is finished.

The cemetery is situated at the outskirts of the village, surrounded by high cypresses, symbolizing death and mourning. The musicians stop outside, while the mourners enter. One of the empty graves awaits the deceased. A handkerchief is placed over his head. A priest sprinkles him with oil, at the head, feet and at both sides of his waist in the form of a cross, so the soul and the bones will become white as the snow. Then, he sprinkles earth at both sides. People wash their hands in water from the bottle. As in the ancient world, it is important to wash the hands before leaving the cemetery. This is a modern parallel to the ancients fearing *miasma*, pollution at death, when a water vessel was set outside the house of death, for the purification of those coming out.

People are queuing up in the mounting path leading from the cemetery. Everybody greet the deceased's closest family who are standing in the middle of the mount. Next to them is a woman distributing paper cups with *kollyva* and plastic spoons. Another woman distributes metaxa. The recipient utters a wish that the dead will be forgiven. When greeting the family, the wife invites everyone for coffee and metaxa at the *kafeneion* (coffee-house) next to the cemetery. At the *kafeneion* are several drunk persons, as usual in Greece at burials and during Easter, and women who have become hoarse as crows after the lamentation. When people have bidden farewell, the family invites their relatives and friends to a fish meal in the deceased's home of childhood. The family avoids eating meat during the next forty days, awaiting the great memorial ritual.

Homer, tragedies, inscriptions, funeral orations, and authors as Plato and Plutarch, vase-paintings and gravestones tell us about the ancient death-cult. Then, as now, it was the privilege of the deceased to be lamented and buried. If the ritual was not performed according to the rules, the dead would not be properly accepted in the world of the dead, and the soul would stroll around without finding rest. This happened to Dolon of Homer, because he had not left the world of the living in a proper way (*Il.* 10).

The ancient death-ritual can also be divided into two main parts: mourning and burial. The women played the most significant role in the first part, while the men had

the leading role in the second.¹³ At the outset we have the immediate mourning, when the closest family-members were tearing their hair; the men threw themselves on the ground and soiled themselves, and the women threw themselves on the dead. Then, followed the washing and preparation of the corpse for its display at the wake. The women had the leading role in these rites, which were followed by the formal lament during the funeral *prothesis*, the “laying out of the corpse” or wake, which might be led by women and men, while the final burial ceremony was led by men.¹⁴

At the wake, the women of the family and professional women mourners were surrounding the bier. The mother or the wife started the lament. At Hektor’s *prothesis*, the lament was performed by two groups; male professional singers and a chorus of women (*Il.* 24.719–776), the latter also providing the protagonists at the lament. Vase-paintings illustrate the location of the mourners: men to the right and women to the left. They raise their arms over their heads. The women beat their breasts and tear their hair.¹⁵ These gestures, including the tearing of their hair, lacerating of their cheeks and breasts, and tearing their dresses, were conventional activities at the ritual performance of the lament. The deceased also received hair-offerings at the journey to the next world (*Il.* 23.46, 134 f., 141–154).

As in modern society, the ancient laments for the dead often included demands for revenge. This is illustrated at the tomb of Agamemnon and in contemporary Mani. It is common for the lamenter to shift pain outwards by blaming the agent of death, thus instigate vengeance or the cycle of private retribution since family loyalty is privileged over loyalty to the state.¹⁶ The laments also continue to act as a release for the grief. Their function is double; they honour and appease the deceased, and express several conflicting emotions.

The duration of the ritual grief before the funeral, varied according the status of the deceased. The funeral ceremony included the *ekphora* or “carrying out” of the body through the city streets, the eventual cremation of the body, the rituals at the tomb, and the burial of the bones or the body, i.e. inhumation. According to Solon’s laws, the funeral procession should take place before the dawn on the third day after death (*Plut. Sol.* 12.4 f., 21.4 f.). In conformity with earlier legislation, Plato claimed that the procession should take place in silence, i.e. without laments or emotional excess (*Pl. Leg.* 947b–e, 958 ff., cf. *Resp.* 398): The unmarried men should head the procession and the women follow behind. Repetitions of the laws and other sources during the

¹³ Women and laments: *Il.* 24.710–776, 19.282–302, cf. *Eur. Hec.* 609–619; *Soph. El.* 1137 f. Men and burial: *Il.* 24.785–799; see also *Pl. Leg.* 947b–e, 958–960, cf. *Thuc.* 2.34; *ABL.* 229,59.

¹⁴ Sourvinou-Inwood 1983: 37, cf. *Il.* 24.793–796. Women’s grief, 24.710 ff., 19.282 ff., *Od.* 8.523–530. Men’s, *Il.* 18.22 ff., 22.408.

¹⁵ Modern women mourners might tear their hair and beat their breasts as well. In pre-classical Greece, i.e. Homeric society, the lamenters were men and women, but the women sum up the life of the dead. The later change is rather a change in attitude towards mourning the dead, illustrated by legislations passed where women are singled out by the restrictions, see also *infra*.

¹⁶ Cf. *Aesch. Cho.* 324–339, 886, and Seremetakis 1991: 28 f., 127–129, 144–157 for Mani. See also Holst-Warhaft 1992: ch. 3 for the politics of revenge in the laments of Mani.

ancient pre-Christian period (SIG³1218) reveal that the archaic laws and Plato's desires were not necessarily successful.¹⁷

Tombs and gifts

Tombs and gifts are important factors in connection with the death-cult. The shape and decoration of the tomb are gifts from the living to the dead. In ancient and contemporary Greece, the gifts dedicated at the tombs tell about the beliefs about the afterlife, thus supplementing the inscriptions. In ancient Greece, we meet the standardized *kouros* (youth) or vase-paintings. In addition to food and libations, the grave-gifts might consist of cuttings of hair, ribbons, wreaths, flowers, and small ceramic vessels. Today, we meet the photos at the tombs, and gifts such as a packet of John Players cigarettes, candies or toys, depending on age and taste. The occasions of the gift giving, the memorial celebrations dedicated to the deceased, belong to the grave-inscriptions telling about the achievements of the dead during her or his life, such as a victory in the ancient world (AP. 7.724), or the university exams passed by a student in contemporary Areopolis in Mani. Aikaterinas G. Taboulari, who died when she was 75 years old, was provided with her glasses and watch in the small enclosure on her tomb that holds an icon and three red flowers.

The memorial rituals performed for the deceased are the occasions for the gift-giving, and after the burial certain memorial rituals must be performed at the tomb, combined with the offering of more material gifts (Håland 2004: 577 f.).

Every Saturday morning, women demonstrate their "poetics of womanhood" by their cleaning-abilities when washing their tombs at the cemetery, before they arrange their food-offerings at the tomb, thus maintaining the social relations with their dead. The theme frequently appears in laments and indicates that the two rituals are closely related.

Today, the official mourning-period generally lasts three years. Memorial rituals are performed on the third, ninth and fortieth day following the burial. The deceased is also honoured every sixth months for three years, the anniversary is particularly important. The Maniats living in Athens return home to their natal villages for two events: olive harvesting and mortuary ceremonies. During the three years which will pass before the bones of the deceased are exhumed, the wife of Konstantinos Nik. Poilantzas will visit his tomb every day, to grieve and care for her deceased husband. The first forty days which are consecrated to mourning and seclusion, she burns an oil lamp in front of the picture of her husband in her house. Then, she brings the picture to the cemetery when the gravestone is dedicated by the male descendants at the ceremony on the fortieth day. On this day, they pray that the earth will accept the deceased. In this period, she will wear black mourning clothes, and although the fortieth day ritual

¹⁷ In the Christian era it is the Church rather than the state that has attempted to control the death-rituals, particularly women's laments, see Holst-Warhaft 1992: ch. 6. See also *infra*.

terminates the first period of mourning and seclusion, she might wear black clothes for the rest of her life. Hence, the female body provides a significant source for social symbolism: It plays an important role in the “poetics of womanhood”, because bodies have social meanings that may be used in public performances. In Greece, the female body both creates and represents the family and social relations in a variety of contexts. By wearing black mourning clothes when a family member dies, women become highly visible symbols of mourning, thus of the kinship relations between the deceased and the living. This importance of the women’s black mourning clothes is stated in ancient traditional sources from Homer when Thetis puts on mourning clothes for her dead son (*Il.* 24.93 f.), but is criticized by Plutarch (*Mor.* 608f4).¹⁸

During the period the dead is buried, special prayers are performed for her or him. People assume that the prayers performed by the living will help the deceased to be forgiven for their sins and reach their final goal, the paradise. At the anniversary, people may arrange water and wine in the house and at the tomb, so the thirst soul of the deceased might come to quench.

Nine days before the first anniversary memorial of the deceased Panagiotis Bidalēs, his father attach the announcement at the streetlamps in the village of Tinos the main township on the Aegean island of Tinos. The ceremony starts with a liturgy in the church dedicated to the patron saint of the family, *Agios* Gioannēs. Afterwards they distribute *sirtari* (*kollyva*), on the top of which has been placed the photo of the deceased during the liturgy. The visitors are treated with cakes, coffee and metaxa. The photo is generally found at his grave, and is returned after the ceremony along with the wreath dedicated by his mother.

The relations between the popular death-cult which is carried out within the domestic sphere and the official festivals, is clearly illustrated by the ritual called the “9th day’s ritual of the *Panagia*” on 23 August which is celebrated annually nine days after the Virgin’s death or “Dormition” on 15 August.

In addition to the memorial services performed within the family sphere, there are annual collective festivals dedicated to the dead. Particular days are dedicated to the dead, as at the ancient Anthesteria, but today these festivals are called *psychosabbata* (i.e. *psychosabbato*, *psychē*=soul, *sabbato*=Saturday), i.e. All Souls’ Days. They are celebrated at the end of winter and at the end of spring, i.e. during the sprouting of the grains, when the flowers and the green grain stalks are proliferating and at harvest time.

The souls of the dead are thought to be set free during the first week of carnival. They wander among the living until they must go back to their dwelling on Assumption Day or during Pentecost.¹⁹ The two final Saturdays during Carnival and the first Sat-

¹⁸ Particularly Seremetakis 1991 has theorized on the nature and meanings of clothing in the modern Greek context.

¹⁹ I.e. they also are thought to wander among the living from the sprouting of the grains until harvest time. During the ancient Greek Anthesteria festival, the dead were thought to visit their former homes and roam around the living for three days around the time of spring germination, Håland 2005: 209-220, 228 f., see also *infra*.

urday in Lent are called *psychosabbata*, “Soul-Saturdays”. All Souls’ Days are also celebrated on the Saturday of Pentecost (Rousalia) and on the Saturday after Pentecost. A long procession of black-clad women is moving towards the cemetery with dishes of food, particularly *kollyva*. The dishes are placed on the graves as an offering to the dead. The relatives light candles and burn incense over the family tomb. The food is blessed by the priest. Afterwards, it is passed round and eaten, so that the souls of the dead may be forgiven. Some of the food is left on the graves as offerings.²⁰ Some people assume that the souls of the dead are set free by sacrificing hens-blood on the graves. At the ancient animal sacrifices, the victim was also killed so that the blood would flow into the earth and appease the souls of the dead. But it is also a sacrifice to the underworld accompanied with a prayer for a bountiful harvest, and might be compared with the way Odysseus by a similar sacrifice came into contact with the seer Teiresias in the underworld, Hades (*Od.* 11). According to Homer, a person became a clairvoyant in the moment of death, and by being nourished with blood from the earthly world the dead could answer the questions of the living. Today, the bloody death of the sacrificial animal next to the tree, ensure the continuity of the vegetable life, such as in the village of Agia Elenē (cf. *supra*).

In general the bones of the deceased are exhumed three years after death and placed in the *ossuary* (where the bones are placed after the exhumation).²¹ After the exhumation, the livings are only responsible for celebrating the collective festivals dedicated to the dead. However, the dead are generally celebrated at the anniversary of their death, also after the exhumation and the second burial.

Ancient offerings and memorial rituals

Whether inhumed or cremated, the ancient dead were buried along with gifts and offerings. As today they were buried with their favored possessions, including mirrors, strigils, toys, and other personal belongings. The ancient burial involved different offerings and rituals: cuttings of hair, libations, blood sacrifices, laments, eulogies and singing. The deceased received gifts as possessions befitting her or his status in life. There are also destructive sacrifices (*Od.* 11.31), motivated by the helpless rage which accompanies grief, but also various other reasons, as offerings to the dead

²⁰ Kollyva is the equivalent to the *panspermia* of the ancients offered at sowing, sprouting and harvest to assure the future crop.

²¹ It is worth mentioning that although the Greek state officially is in the process of instituting cremation of the dead (while the right to hold civil funerals is being required, however), with the prospect of complete secularization of the funeral service in view, in practical life people still carry out the traditional customs: At Tinos where I have carried out the bulk of my fieldwork, they still exhume the bones and place them in the ossuary. When asking some of my informants about the future on a second anniversary last August, I was told that they “would exhume grandmothers bones, they would be cleaned in oil by her daughter (i.e. my mother according you my young informant) or the priest before being placed in the ossuary”. It will be interesting to see how this is followed up by the official state of Greece trying to abolish a custom that has been a living tradition for millennia.

corresponding to those dedicated to other chthonic deities. A new tomb was sprinkled with grain. The grave was always a place for libations, sometimes the libation vessels were broken and left there, thus paralleling the modern wine bottle. No burial was without a funerary banquet. The deceased duly provided for, is, correspondingly, often imagined at a banquet, as the large group of so-called *Totenmahl* reliefs shows. Dance was also important at lamentations and burials. According to an inscription from Keos, the funeral rituals were terminated by purifying the house with seawater, followed by washing the next day. Finally, they sacrificed to Hestia (the Hearth) (SIG. 1218).

After the funeral, the funerary sacrifices and funerary banquet are recapitulated at increasing intervals: on the third day and on the ninth (*enata*) day, food is brought again to the grave. On the thirtieth day a communal feast is held to mark the end of the official mourning period. As today, the anniversary ritual, was celebrated, and there were other less formal visits to the tomb, for example to appease the spirits of the dead.

To care for the graves is a duty which falls on the descendants, officially the male citizens, but in practical life, we see the predominance of women on funerary white-ground *lēkythoi* deposited in or on the grave thus, confirming their critical role in the tendance of the dead and the family grave. The same reality is attested in the tragedies and later in Plutarch. The tragedies constitute a particularly important category of sources telling about the death, burial and following rituals in the domestic or family sphere. In the opening sequence of Euripides' *Orestes*, Orestes has killed his mother Klytāimnestra. Her sister, Helena, sends her daughter, Harmonia, to perform the ritual libations at the grave of her sister (Eur. *Or.* 112–124).

After the thirtieth day ritual, the official honouring of the deceased is incorporated into the general celebrations with which the city honours its dead every year: days of the dead, *Nekysia*, or days of the forefathers, *Genesisia*. *Nemesia* was probably an all-night festival dedicated to the dead. Another feast lasted nine days. Ceremonies dedicated to the dead were also celebrated within the domestic, familial sphere, paralleling the contemporary *psychosabbata* when the public rituals have finished (see *infra*). During these ceremonies, they had meals at the tombs and the relatives invoked the deceased by name (*mneia*), thus paralleling the modern letters, or *moirologia*, laments written in memory of the dead in Olympos (see *infra*). They also distributed food to the other participants.

On such days the graves are adorned (ARV 746,4, 748,1), offerings are made, special food is eaten, and it is said that the dead come up and go about in the city. The offerings for the dead are pourings, *choai*: barley broth, milk, honey, frequently wine, and especially oil, as well as blood of sacrificed animals; there are also simple libations of water, which is why there is talk of the bath of the dead. According to Isaeus (6.51), there is also *enagizein*, the consecration and burning of foods and sacrificial victims; but the living, too, have their feast, as in contemporary society. Indeed, it is through the “meals of mortals ordained by custom”, the “enjoyable, fat-steaming, burnt offerings of the earth”, that the deceased receives his honour. An epigram from the Hellenistic period tells about the dead Cleitagoras: being in the world of mother Earth

and Persephone, he asks for flowers, milk and the playing of pipes. In return he will also give gifts (AP. 7.657).

The custom when they carried *kallysmata*, the sweepings from the house, to the tomb once a month has been considered as a ritual carried out to remove eventual miasma, impurities from the house, but it might also have been an offering in the same way as other grave offerings. One may draw that conclusion by comparing the ritual with the customary use of the sweepings from the sanctuary dedicated to the *Panagia* during her “Dormition” festival at modern Tinos island and the tomb of Ag. Gerasimos on the festival commemorating his death on the Ionian island of Kephallonia, where he is patron saint. Many islanders also assume that sweepings from the church might appease storms. It also has a healing function and is kept as an amulet. In other words, the grave offering also has an apotropaic function.

The second day of the Anthesteria festival (12 *Anthesterion*), around 1 March, was polluted. It was supposed that the spirits of the dead returned to earth and roamed around the living (Schol. Ar. *Ach.* 1076). Accordingly they took precautions. They honoured the dead with an offering of *panspermia* (all kinds of grains, cf. *kollyva*), and libations as prescribed by customs, afterwards they were driven out. Nekysia and the Anthesteria, the ancient flower and death-festivals may be compared with the modern Rousalia, but the Carnivals as well – particularly the Kalogeros-festival (Håland 2005) and the Soul-Saturdays - celebrated at the same time of the year as the Anthesteria, i.e. around the time of spring germination.

Initially Genesisia was a festival celebrated within the domestic sphere at the anniversary of the deceased. In his struggle against the clan cult of the powerful kin groups, Solon wanted to reduce the expenditure on funerals and thereby the kin-women’s display in connection with their mourning of the dead (cf. Plut. *Sol.* 12B, 21.4 f.). So, he reorganized the Genesisia from being a grand festival celebrated at the anniversary of a big man’s death to an official festival dedicated to the dead in general, a change that similarly to the restrictive legislation concerning funerals, can be seen as a part of the broader process towards democracy. Therefore, the Genesisia was transformed from a clan festival towards a common citizen festival celebrated before sowing in autumn, just before the Mysteries at Eleusis.

The inhabitants in polis needed a particular place to go to recall what the actual person or legend meant to them. Accordingly, the graves were important, such as the empty grave of Akhilleus in Elis, in front of which the women perform ceremonies in his honour, and observe the rites of lamentation for him at the beginning of the festival in Olympia (Paus. 6.23,3, 6.24,1, both in the Peloponnese).²² One may also mention Pelops’ grave (Paus. 5.13,8) in Olympia, or the grave of one’s deceased daughter. The tomb is marked with a stone, the sign, *sema*. The sign proclaims the deceased to all eternity telling about the achievements in life and assures protection in death. At

²² What does it mean that the dead do not even need to be present physically in the grave/tomb? One of the implications is probably that one may have several tombs, but in general it is necessary to have a part of the body (cf. supra), or another symbol (cf. amulets).

the festivals of the dead, the *stēlai* are washed, anointed and wound with fillets. This is illustrated at the tall vessels, *lēkythoi*, which serve for the libations of oil. The *sema*, may also be understood as a mysterious guardian of the dead person; thus lions and sphinxes are found as grave markers. Accordingly the grave also protected the living, in the same way as the hero.

Among the various memorials erected after burial, *stēlai*, were the most common in the archaic period. Beginning as roughly worked, undecorated slabs, the *stēlē* shaft later was decorated with a figure meant to represent the deceased, such as the grave *stēlē* of Hegeso, the daughter of Proxenos ca. 400 BCE. The *stēlē* might be painted, incised, or carved in relief, and frequently topped with sphinxes. A parallel is found in the inscription where a mother mourns her daughter, Thersis: Instead of a solemn wedding and marriage-bed her mother gave her a statue for her marble tomb, it stands life-sized, it has her beauty, so, although she is dead, she can still speak with her (AP. 7.649).

From the end of the fifth century, the custom of family tombs emerges. This custom arises parallel to and separate from the public funerals performed in honour of those patriotically fallen in combat during which the deceased's individuality is submerged in the common glory of the polis.²³ The funerary *stēlai* associate the deceased with the surviving members of the household. The epitaphs celebrate the personal feelings of love, regret, and admiration of husbands and wives, parents and children. On the other hand, the importance of the death-cult within the family-sphere is also attested in earlier periods. This is illustrated by the law-givers struggle against the display and the female laments. It is also illustrated by the tragedies and vase-paintings (ARV 743,5, 746,4, 845,168, 748,1).

Several researchers have discussed the development and change in grave monuments and the real meaning of the legislation that limited funerary extravagance at the turn from the archaic to the classical period (such as Vernant 1989), and perhaps a comparison with modern society may help clarifying the sources. It has been debated whether the production of gravestones have diminished or not early in the fifth century. From the end of the century, however, there is another shift back to magnificent grave monuments again. The shift has been analyzed as a relaxation in the anti-luxury legislation, since families are permitted to erect greater monuments, and a return to display. This may be compared with the importance of display in contemporary society, such as the sumptuous grave monuments in Athens and in the village of Olympos, which are quite normal despite the general critique of display within the same societies. Therefore it might also have been difficult for Solon (Plut. *Sol.* 12 and 21) and other legislators to carry out their legislation in practical life. Similar laws are introduced from the end of the fifth century BCE (*SIG* 1218), and later by Demetrios of Phaleon (317 BCE), and Plutarch is critical to the same customs in his own lifetime (ca. 50-120 CE. *Mor.* 608a ff., 114f-115a). A continuous production of grave monuments and/or change in fashion, might indicate that the anti-luxury laws did not

²³ Vernant 1989: 217-220, cf. Holst-Warhaft 1992: 117, see also 114 ff.

have a great influence on changes in burial practices. Many gifts, as clothes, food, vessels with wine and oil, as the women competed with each other in giving, then as now, are perishable. A change in legislation does not necessarily indicate a change in belief. The picture we have from Athens, may also suggest a return to the older more traditional ways of honouring the dead after the plague in 430/429 BCE, and signify the importance of deep-seated values in the long run, and demonstrate that the eventual change did not last very long. Perhaps the plague was a punishment for neglecting the cult of the dead (cf. Paus. 8.42,6 for this way of thinking)?

The Greek extended family which was so important within the political and social structure of the polis, could demonstrate its identity by a common burial ground on the terrain of the ancestors, as confirmed by the orator, Demostenes in the speech *Against Macartatus* (Dem. 43.79, see also 57.67 concerning “those who have the right to the same places of burial”) concerning “the place of burial common to all those descended from the Buselus (it is called the burial-place of the Buselidae, a large area, enclosed, after the manner of the men of old).” Until recently, the same pattern has been customary on Karpathos and in Mani.²⁴ Solon and other law-givers tried to reduce the expenditure on funerals, not to help the poor, but to strangle the display by powerful families which made them even more powerful.

Grave-inscriptions and funeral orations

In Greek tradition one may distinguish two contrasting ideas concerning death. The classical funeral oration, *Epitaphios Logos*, employs the term, “a beautiful death” which differs from the disfigured corpse belonging to the vanquished warrior in Homeric epic. The point is the difference between Homeric presentation of death and Perikles’ whose aim was to mobilize warriors to a standing army, and thus had to glorify the value of dying in the service of the state, polis, particularly because they feared lamenting mourning mothers.

The different forms of self-mutilation that were aspects of female grieving was a way to lessen emotional anguish²⁵ by converting it into physical pain. In politically charged environments, outpourings of grief at a funeral also provide the opportunity for a clan to display its might, and for the authorities to assert theirs by limiting or denying ritual observances as dramatized in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, where a lone woman throwing dust on her brother’s corpse is viewed as a political threat. According to Plutarch, writing in the late-antique period: *He (Solon) also subjected the public appearances of the women, their mourning and their festivals, to a law which did away with disorder and licence. ... Laceration of the flesh by mourners, ... , he forbade. ... Most of these practices are also forbidden by our laws, but ours contain the additional proviso that such offenders shall be*

²⁴ For Karpathos, see Vernier 1991. Concerning the power of the clans in Mani, cf. Seremetakis 1991: ch. 2, 8 ff. and Holst-Warhaft 1992: 102 and 118 ff.

²⁵ There are probably multiple reasons for it, see for example, Dutsch 2008.

punished by the board of censors for women, because they indulge in unmanly and effeminate extravagances of sorrow when they mourn. (Plut. *Sol.* 21.4 f.) We have many modern similar instances in present-day's Mediterranean societies and elsewhere.²⁶

From the sixth century onwards legislation was introduced in Athens and other city-states aiming at the restriction of mourning of the dead, particularly women's laments which by expressing pain, frustration and anger, was a powerful challenge to social order. The state's need to raise a standing army meant that death had to be glorified not lamented. The virtues of the Homeric warrior then, was later transferred to the citizen, who is praised in death and not only in life. An epitaph records the deeds of the deceased in life, laments his death and describes the mourning of the living (AP.7.724). The inscription describes the reminding function of the memorial concerning the deeds fulfilled by the deceased.

The importance of the inscription is further illustrated by the funeral oration and the invocation of the deceased during the commemorative celebrations. The invocation of the dead by name in the tragedies is different from the *Epitaphios Logos* of the classical period, in which anonymity is the rule; the collective dead are celebrated not the singular individual.

The funeral oration was officially institutionalized in the classical period. It has been seen (Loraux 1981b; Holst-Warhaft 1992) as the male polis' appropriation and civilization of women's laments, illustrated by Perikles' speech for those who died in the first years of the Peloponnesian War, reproduced in Thucydides (2.34-46). In the Athenian funeral oration, the classical tragedy, and the official festivals, as the reorganized *Genesia* or *Epitaphia*, we encounter the death-cult as it is employed by the official male ideology. However, when men attempt to appropriate women's domains, as illustrated through the classical tragedy's (Aesch. *Cho.* 22-31, 327-339) and funeral oration's (Thuc. 2.34-46) "appropriation" of women's traditional laments, this demonstrates an acknowledgement of the importance of women's rituals.²⁷ Athens (male) attempts to curb women's festivals and laments which posed a threat to the official society, were probably only partly successful, since it has been stated (Holst-Warhaft 1992) that the same process happened in the Byzantine and modern periods when new attempts to curb women's laments became important. The picture from the Christian era however is not very different from its forerunner: women were still lamenting, and the female laments continued to our own days, since women's laments and other rituals remained essential parts of the death-rituals of rural Greece.²⁸ In other words, one may claim that men never managed to appropriate women's rituals, since ancient women

²⁶ For the modern material, see for example Seremetakis 1991; Holst-Warhaft 1992, 2000, she also provides much evidence for the ancient context in her 1992-publication.

²⁷ Holst-Warhaft 1992: quotes classical sources and analyzes the texts to show how men appropriated women's rituals, but I have argued that they did not manage to appropriate women's domains, Håland 2007a: ch. 6.

²⁸ Sources for the Christian picture are found in Alexiou 1974, 2002; Caraveli 1986; Seremetakis 1991; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Psychogiou 2008. See also *supra* and *infra* for my own fieldwork.

continued the laments for their own dead notwithstanding what went on at the classical stage in different theatres, this is illustrated by the repeated passing of laws.

Although the classical Athenian polis (the democratic period) officially attached great importance to the public funerals that celebrated those who gave their lives for the service of the state, ordinary people did probably not feel it that way, and even Perikles had to let everyone bring what he wished to his own dead (Thuc. 2.34) and the female part of the families were present to make their laments for their own dead at the tomb (Thuc. 2.34,4). A possible parallel might be found in the modern official ceremony on *psychosabbata* in Athens, illustrating both saint cult (dedicated to *Ag. Theodoros*), common rituals, and ordinary people's cult dedicated to their own deceased. In spite of solemn sermons by the archbishop, the mayor of Athens, the distributing of a common *kollyva* and wreathing of the monument dedicated to the soldiers that fell during 2nd World War, this part of the celebration is not necessarily more important than people's own ceremonies. As soon as the official ceremony finishes, people's "real" ceremonies start at their own graves. Several of them do not participate in the public ceremony, but go directly to their own tombs.

So the ancient world may have its parallel in the relation between the contemporary official and domestic rituals during *psychosabbata*, where the official celebration only comprises a minor part of the entire ritual. It reminds us of how difficult it is to change people's deep-seated beliefs and emotions, but also that official rituals reflect people's cult within the domestic sphere.

Communication between the living and the dead

Through their laments women communicate with the deceased, and they are thereby regarded as mediators between the world of the dead and that of the living, in several places in Europe and the Middle East. Women's mourning rituals, particularly their laments, were and are an essential part of Greek death-rituals, and the public performance of lament is regarded as essential in modern Greece: Without it, death is silent and unmarked for the deceased. The modern Greek word for lament, *moiroloi*, appears first in the *Life of Alexander* attributed to Pseudo-Kallisthenes (ca. 300 BCE).²⁹ In the modern village of Olympos, a woman would explain the written letters attached to the *Epitaphios*, on Good Friday as *moirologia*, laments written in memory of the dead. The written laments are accompanied with pictures of the actual recently deceased. When the men leave the church after the official service, the women start their own ritual lament in front of the *Epitaphios*, while tearing their loosened hair. But, they are not lamenting Christ; they are lamenting their own dead family-members, particularly those who died most recently, and who are represented in the pictures. In the village of Olympos, in 1992, the priest's wife in particular, was intensely lamenting in front of the picture of her brother who had been found lifeless on the

²⁹ Holst-Warhaft 1992: 40, see also 35-37 for lament and memory.

beach some days before Easter. This overlay of mourning for the personal dead and the holy (long-) dead illustrates the interdependence of the two rituals and how domestic rituals and the official rituals reflect each other, the domestic being the base for the latter.

The lament is a female response to death, but it also embodies the relationship of the society to death, and is, by consequence, fundamental to life. Lamenters are responsible for keeping the memory of the deceased alive. It is also by way of laments that heroic ancestors are kept alive. For example, Alexander the Great, one of the alleged glorious ancestors of the Greeks as well as of the other Europeans, is kept alive through laments.

The female laments have continued to this day and the cult of the dead remains the foundation and expression of family identity: the honour accorded to forebears is expected from descendants: from the remembrance of the dead grows the will to continue, thus the Greek death-cult provide a transition for both the living and the dead, and may also illustrate the realities in the rest of the Mediterranean world, past and present.

The relations between the dead and the living and the ideas about the afterlife, then, have lead us back to the cult of the dead mediator, which may have emerged in a more clarified light, since every deceased, both those belonging to the official society and the family's own dead, in reality is a magical mediator in the communication between worlds in which he or she ensures the benefit of the living world. The sacrifice is central within this communication.

The different, and sometimes paradoxical, ideas and beliefs about death which we encounter in Greek culture, ancient and modern, illustrate the humans' efforts to cope with this inevitable passage. The rituals related to the death-cult in the Mediterranean area are characterized by continuity, and we should not exclude that the stability in the rituals may demonstrate similarities in ideas and beliefs in connection with the cult, particularly since the actual rural societies are still predominantly agricultural. In this way modern society can enlighten ancient society and vice versa.

When explaining other aspects of social life, we have to take into account the meaning of the death-rituals, because they are not separated from each other, but are connected. They are mutually dependent, and a central element in this connection is the cyclical logic found in agricultural societies. Accordingly, vegetation divinities or holy dead persons, most often female, are celebrated annually together with dead heroes or heroines before important passages of the agricultural year, in order to secure these passages and ensure a rich harvest.

According to the Greek belief in general, the dead hero was the founder of a lineage. The classical hero was, nevertheless, often introduced as an ideological symbol of unity, paralleling the later periods' introduction or revitalizing of old customs to create unifying elements in the name of the nation-building. This is illustrated by the festival dedicated to the Life-giving Spring, which was established in Konstantinople by

the Patriarch in 1833, the same year as the Greek struggle for independence came to a successful conclusion, and the Kingdom was established, thus illustrating an example of ideological reuse of old popular symbols in the service of the Greek nation-state (Håland 2007b). In the ancient world, they could also revitalize an ancient legend, as Hektor (Dowden 1989: 51-53). The exploitation of Lazar on contemporary Balkan, which is very relevant today and which started this article, illustrates a parallel logic.

These examples demonstrate how new ideologies must adjust to popular value-systems related to fundamental beliefs, or long lasting mentalities in the Mediterranean, here illustrated by the importance of the death-cult in general and by analysing its different elements in particular: laments, burials and the following memorial rituals as the body of the article has done. The importance of mourning for the personal dead such as in modern Olympos and the commemoration rituals at the cemetery clearly show how the rituals in the domestic sphere are the fundament on which the public rituals are built. This is illustrated by the ancient ideology of the polis and the later Christian ideology. The ritual symbols have several meanings, and this is how and why they work. We meet the importance of the cult of the bones through the official ideologies' manipulation with the popular value-systems, such as the ancient polis' manipulation with the bones of Orestes, the later periods fight over the bones of *Ag. Andreas*, or the tombs in Hebron. The same way of thinking is attested in the contemporary procession with *Ag. Nektarios'* skull, during his festival at the island of Aegina, where he is patron saint, thus ensuring the fertility and prosperity of the island for another year. We see how Slobodan Milocevic could exploit the death-cult to start the war, because the cult is so important for people. Accordingly, people may have mourned the coffin during the intermediary 600 years, although it might not have been the coffin of Lazar. Perhaps many of them did not even know who he was. Several of those who are regarded as mourning deceased guardians of society, are in fact mourning their own dead, i.e. many of those weeping persons who were watching the coffin, probably mourned their own dead. This is illustrated in Olympos where people mourn their own dead. Very few, or perhaps no-one, laments the distant abstraction, Jesus Christ who lived and died in a far-away country. When Christ's body is carried around in the streets of Olympos, people who have newly deceased family members weep, others laugh. But, concerning political manipulation of value-systems, it was probably easier to introduce Christ in Greece, since he, in many ways, substituted for Adonis or other vegetation gods, which in their turn were adjusted to people's own death-cult.³⁰ So, we may ask: who is actually being worshipped? It is the common belief in connection with the death-cult or ritual, which makes it acceptable for people: Generally, people have certain claims or expectations about acceptable criteria towards their rulers, for example death-cult, if they are likely to accept new ideologies, whether that is polis', Christianity's or the nation-state's.

³⁰ I regret that there is no place to discuss evidence from the intervening periods between ancient and modern, see however Håland 2004 (also for a discussion of Harrison 1977: 202 n. 2, citing Lawson 1910: 573) and 2007a for some examples (cf. also n.1 supra), cf. also Alexiou 1974, 2002.

In other words, the modern domestic rituals people perform for their own dead influence the official ideological rituals, and vice versa, the domestic rituals reflect public performances. The study of modern cult practices reveals many parallels with the official cult of the ancients. We see that new ideologies must adjust to older rituals and beliefs and how official or public and domestic rituals still are closely connected. These similarities might represent a common way of expression within a larger context in which the Mediterranean cultural meaning of emotion is central.

So the article took its departure by illustrating how the death-cult is extant in a wide variety of cultures, and suggesting that by understanding the workings of the death-cult in a specific region we will gain a greater understanding of the ways in which the death-cult is used in the political arena in the modern world. In the actual geographical area the political meanings of death-cults have traditionally been important, and since the official rituals reflect the domestic death-cult, an examination of the local, in essence familial death-cult helps to understand the national. In other words, to understand the political uses of the death-cult, I have discussed the characteristic aspects of the death-cult within the domestic sphere in Greece, because it reflects the death-cult of the official or public sphere, i.e. the official ideological rituals are influenced by the domestic rituals people perform for their own dead, and vice versa, the domestic rituals simultaneously reflect the public performances. The article therefore has argued that the modern and ancient world can be compared to shed light on one another and the geographical wider world where we find similar values. By comparing the domestic female and public male spheres we also see the importance of the former for the latter, a world of men and women and not only women within a predominately male world, and therefore also the real meaning and importance of emotion but also contested identities and politics in the sphere of death-cult in the contemporary Balkans.

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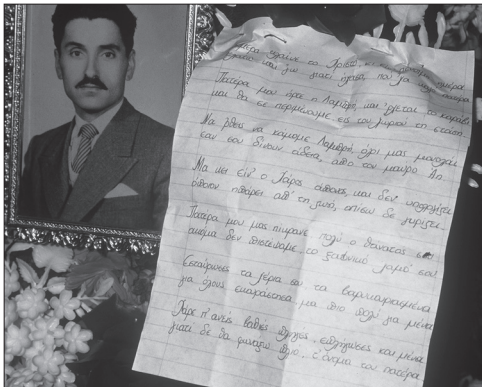
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