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**Women's laments in death ceremonies in Epirus.
The ultimate moment of farewell****Abstract:**

Posthumous ceremonies are an ancient ritual custom found in various peoples. It is already known to us that from the ancient times, closer relatives, mainly women, are responsible for the lamentation of the dead. The rituals concerning the burial of the deceased still occur incomprehensibly throughout the centuries, from antiquity until quite recently. In the region of Epirus these rituals continue in many communities until nowadays. As a basic means of expressing all the manifestations of human social life, singing is also, in this case, an integral part of death rituals. The mourning, the woman's lament, is the ultimate moment of conversation with the deceased and accompanies him to his final resting place.

This article attempts to clarify the woman's role during death rituals in the region of Epirus and, in particular, her relation with the lament at the ultimate moment of farewell. Afterwards, we study the laments' motifs concerning Charon (Death), Hades and the connection, the conversation between the living and the Underworld. The woman, the mourner, bears the heavy burden of taking up the work of this communication.

Key words:

laments, death ceremonies, Charos, Underworld, Epirus, western Greece

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Introduction

The region of Epirus is located in northwest Greece, to its west lies the Ionian Sea, to its south the Amvrakikos Gulf, to the north it borders Albania and its main body consists of the big mountain range of Pindos. It is a mountainous region, which, based on its Gross Domestic Product, is among the poorest and least developed of the countries of Europe that are part of the common currency of euro.

Homer has placed the passage to the Underworld in Epirus since antiquity. In the west of Epirus, on the River Acheron which flows into the Ionian Sea, there is Charon, who takes people's souls with his boat and transfers them to Hades. Odysseus too goes to Acheron, where he descends to the Underworld, a living person among the dead, following the suggestion of Circe, to take the oracle from the seer Tiresias on how to return to Ithaca. It is the "most ancient and most shocking description of a living's descent to the Underworld" (Dakaris 2000, 10). In the same area, there is the archaeological site of the Nekromanteion or Nekyomanteion (Oracle of the dead) of the lower course of Acheron, where Odysseus goes to offer milk, oil, wine, etc. to the dead, in order to receive the oracle from Tiresias (Aggeli 2015, 6).

In the 10th rhapsody, Odysseus announces to his comrades that they must go to Hades. When they find out about the descent, they wail and lament:

So I spoke, and their spirit was broken within them, and sitting down right where they were, they wept and tore their hair. But no good came of their lamenting. "But when we were on our way to the swift ship and the shore of the sea, sorrowing and shedding big tears (...)" (Murray 1919).

ὡς ἐφάμην, τοῖσιν δὲ κατεκλάσθη φίλον ἦτορ, ἐζόμενοι δὲ κατ' αὐθι γόων τίλλοντό τε χαίτας· ἀλλ' οὐ γάρ τις πρῆξις ἐγένετο μυρομένοισιν. ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ῥ' ἐπὶ νῆα θοὴν καὶ θίνα θαλάσσης ἦομεν ἀχνύμενοι, θαλερὸν κατὰ δάκρυ χέοντες (...).²

In the next rhapsody (the 11th) occurs the descent in the Underworld, the encounter and the conversation with the dead.

Posthumous ceremonies are an ancient ritual custom found in various peoples. It is already known to us that from the ancient times,

2 The Odyssey, rhapsody κ', 565-569.

closer relatives, mainly women, are responsible for the lamentation of the dead (Alexiou 2002, 41). Nadia Seremetakis, referring to the importance of the role of women in the post-mortem ceremonies of Mani region in the southern Peloponnese, says that in Inner Mani, the center of production of female speech and female cultural power are death rituals and the practice of foretelling related to them (Seremetakis 1994, 30). Likewise, Psychogiou in her book "Rituals of Death and Resurrection in western Greece" says that rituals of death are almost exclusively in women's cultural space (Psychogiou 2008, 21).

The rituals concerning the burial of the deceased still occur incomprehensibly throughout the centuries, from antiquity until quite recently (Alexiou 2002, 67). In the region of Epirus these rituals continue in many communities until nowadays. The passage to the Underworld, which dates back to the Homeric years, has its representations and symbolisms in the same region, in Epirus, with women owing a primary role in the accomplishment of these processes.

Laments in death ceremonies

In the traditional communities of Epirus, songs about the "circle of life" define the most important stages of a human, from his birth to his death. The final stage of the "circle of life", the passage to the Underworld, is of great importance and it is accompanied by a series of rituals. As a basic means of expressing all the manifestations of human social life, singing is also, in this case, an integral part of death rituals. The mourning, the woman's lament, is the ultimate moment of conversation with the deceased and accompanies him to his final resting place.

According to Alexiou, various opinions have been expressed, occasionally, concerning the origin of the term "μοιρολόι" ([mirolói] lament). Discussion was raised mainly over the origin of the first component of the word. Alexiou, after semantically and historically examining and analyzing the noun "μοίρα" ([míra] fate), the verb "μύρομαι" ([mírome] cry) and even the prefix "μυριο-" ([mirjo] milli- & multi-), comes to the conclusion that the proper use of the term derives from "μοίρα" (fate). The first capture of the term is thus described in *The Romance of Alexander the Great*, by Pseudo-Callisthe-

nes, around 300BC. The equivalent term that has always been and is still being used in church language is “θρήνος” [θρίνος]. Her work, which presents a number of international bibliographical references on the subject, is the first systematic interdisciplinary approach to the ritualistic lament from the antiquity to the contemporary lament of Greek tradition (Alexiou 2002, 190-203).

In Epirus, laments are expressed in a strictly defined ritual framework. Once the deceased is at home, if there is still daylight, the process of mourning, the farewell with laments, begins. When the night comes, this process ceases and the face of the dead is covered with a garment (shroud). The mourning and lamentation of women begins again when the sun comes up on the day of the burial in the dead man’s house, until he departs for the church. During the funeral service in church and until the time of the burial, laments stop.³

The process of lamentation continues in the next few days in the memorials carried out in honour of the deceased. Memorials are held on nine, twenty and forty days, six months and one year after one’s death. In the communities of the prefecture of Arta, in memorial services, laments are sang after the Sunday service and before the priest administers the last rites to the dead (a ritual named Trisagion in Greek Orthodox Church) at his grave. They differ in the content of the verse from those of the funeral, but they are sung with the exact same melody. The laments in the communities of the prefecture of Arta in southern Epirus are exclusively sung in rituals of lamentation and they do not appear in any other social activity.

Regarding funeral and memorial rituals in the communities of the prefecture of Ioannina, in the north of Epirus, it is in the same pattern as that of the communities of the prefecture of Arta. According to the informants, a differentiation lies in the fact that in Vlachophonous communities of Pindos in the prefecture of Ioannina (Metsovo, Milia), if the deceased was young, the lamentation takes place in the deceased’s home by his relatives, every morning for an entire year. Distinctively, Kalipopi Giannoukas says that if the dead

³ In the region of Epirus, laments are also sung inside the church, before the funeral service. Regarding the embodiment of ancient greek elements in Christianity, Alexiou claims that the advent of Christianity has not, brought about inevitable transformations on the particular characteristics of a cultural element so profoundly idolatrous (...), see Alexiou (2002, 67). On the same issue, Motsios refers to the preservation of the roles of the diversity of secular rituals with church, after the prevalence of Christianity as the only religion in Byzantium and post-Byzantine Hellenism, see Motsios (2000, 43).

were young, they were lamentating at home, after the funeral, for a whole year, every morning. The same was happening at their grave. A fellow villager of hers, whose daughter had died, was saying "I should keep company to my daughter".⁴ The same informant says that if a young woman had lost her husband, she would lament for a year, and apart from that, she was not to comb her hair for forty days. Also, the loss and the indication of mourning manifested itself in the lifelong wearing of black clothes.

The texts of laments

The classification of the patterns of the laments is a matter that has troubled the science of folklore over the past century. The Hellenic Folklore Research Center proposes a logical order of ranking, which is partly applied by Saunier in his study of Greek laments. Saunier, however, differs from this classification, and the separation of motives is, according to him, a logical classification, similar to that applied to songs of emigration (Saunier 1999, 20-21).

One of these categories presented by Saunier in his anthology concerns the laments that refer to Charos. In this publication we will present and analyze extracts of laments that refer to Charos, Hades, and the connection between the living and the Underworld.

As mentioned in the Introduction of the article, Odysseus of Homer descends to the Underworld and talks with the dead. In modern Epirus, the mourner is the one who talks with Charos either as a narrator, or as a speaker on the behalf of the deceased.

In the laments I recorded, the mourner is sent by Charos in order to marry a young couple; however, at the wedding she encounters bloodshed and misfortune (no 1). In another case, the mourner, in her conversation with Charos, begs him not to take the unmarried couple with him (no 2). In another extract, the same mourner refers to the bad conditions in Hades and the "black earth", which makes disappear anything beautiful youth has to offer (no 3 & no 7).

The dialogue that takes place between the mourner and the mother of Charos is also very interesting. The latter urges women to hide their husbands, their brothers and their children, so that her son, Charos, who appears as a "hunter", does not meet them (No. 4).

⁴ Gianouka, Kaliopi, Metsovo, Ioannina, 09.10.2016, oral testimony.

Saunier also refers to the mother of Charos, whom he calls “Charontissa”. However, in that case, she takes on a completely different role (Saunier 1999, 362). In another case, the deceased urges the mourner to get Charos to drink a lot, so that he falls asleep and then she can leave unnoticed by him (no 5). The same mourner refers to the mother, who after her children’s invocation, goes looking, in Hades, for a literate young man, in order to send a letter to her children. (no 6).

In the next case of patterns, the mourner asks of Charos, who is leading her to the Underworld, to hold her hand in order to inform her mother not to wait for her (no 8). Finally, in the region of Ioannina, emigration is considered a synonym for death. In fact, in a song about emigration which is also sung as a lament, the mourner mentions that emigration is worse than death because there is no consolation to it (no 9).

Extracts of laments⁵

Extract 1

Trees you can either bloom or wither I won’t sit under your shadow to enjoy the fresh breeze Nor will I harvest your fruits, for death invited me to marry a young couple.

Θέλιτι δέντρα μ’ ανθίσιτι, θέλιτι μαραθείτι στουν ίσκιο σας δεν κάθουμι ούιτι κι στη δρουσιά σας κι τουν καρπό π’ θα κάνετι ιγώ δεν θα τριγύσου γιατί μο’ στείλ’ ου Χάρους κάλισμα να πάου να στιφανώσου.

(Antoniou - Lampri, Maria, Kommemo Artas, 2004)

Extract 2

Death, I beg of you, do us a favour, don’t take these unmarried children with you.

Χάρι μου σι παρακαλώ χατίρι να μας κάνεις
τα πιδιά τ’ ανύπαντρα να μην τα μαραγκιάσεις.

(Antoniou - Lampri, Maria, Kommemo Artas, 2004)

⁵ Translation of the lyrics: Nikolaidi, Revekka.

Extract 3

Has anyone seen a sun in the earth, a moon in the soil? Has anyone seen a blooming tree planted in Hades with leaves of green and fresh fruit?

Ποιος είδι ήλιο μες τη γης φιγγάρι μες του χώμα ποιος είδι κλαράκι φουντουτό στουν Άδη φυτεμένο να χεί τα φύλλα πράσινα κι τουν καρπό αφράτου.

(Antonioni - Lampri, Maria, Kommeno Artas, 2004)

Extract 4

Be silent, I will sing a lament. I didn't hear it neither from a widow nor from a married woman. It was sung and still is sung by the mother of Death: -Women, hide your men and sisters, hide your brothers and the youngest of the mothers hide your children, for Death is ready to go out hunting.

Σουπάσιτι 'συχάσιτι να πω ένα μοιριολόϊ. Ούτε από χήρα τ' άκουσα, ούτε από παντρεμένη. Η μάνα τ' Χάρου το 'λεγε η μάνα τ' Χάρ' το λέει: - Γυναίκις κρύψτι τ'ς άντρις σας κι οι αδιφρές τ' αδέρφια κι οι μάνις οι μικρότερες να κρύψουν τα πιδιά τους γιατί ου Χάρους ιτιμάστηκε κι παεί να κυνηγήσει.

(Tsola - Lazana, Aggeliki, Chalkiades Artas, 2016)

Extract 5

Take Death and put him by your side give him raki, give him wine and try to get him drunk so that he falls asleep and you could leave unnoticed. For your children and grand-children wait for you.

Να πάρεις κι το Χάρουντα κι βάλ' τον στο πλιυρό σου. Δώσ' του ρακή, δώσ' του κρασί μήπως κι τον μεθύσεις να πέσει ν' απουκοιμηθεί, να ξικλιφτείς να φύγεις. Σε καρτερούνε τα πιδιά κι τα γλυκά σ' αγγόνια.

(Tsola - Lazana, Aggeliki, Chalkiades Artas, 2016)

Extract 6

And I, for your sake and your great misery have wandered all over Hades and all over the underworld to find a literate young man that also owns a pen and also owns a piece of paper to help me write three letters, three bitter words.

- Κι 'γω για το χατίρι σας κι τον πουλύ καημό σας όλου τουν Άδη γύρισα κι όλου τουν κάτω κόσμο για να βρει νιο γραμματικό να 'χει κι καλαμάρι να 'χει κι πράσινο χαρτί να ξύσει τη μιλάνη να γράψου τρία γράμματα, τρία καμμένα λό'ια.

(Tsola – Lazana, Aggeliki, Chalkiades Artas, 2016)

Extract 7

Curse you, black earth and cobwebbed soil. The young people I have sent, don't let them rot. Give them food, let them drink tell them to sing a song for those who don't have a dear one in emigration, they don't fear the foreign land and those who don't have a dear one in the army, they can't get killed by bullets and those who don't have a dear one in the black earth, they're not afraid of Death. And so I, a helpless mother, who has a dear one in emigration, I fear the foreign land I who has a dear one in the army, I fear the bullets I who has a dear one in the black earth, I fear Death. Αναθιμά σε μαύρη γη κι αραχνιασμένου χώμα.

Αυτούς τους νιους που σου 'στειλα να μην τους αραχνιάσεις.
Δώσ' τους να φαν, δώσ' τους να πιουν πες τους να γουδήσουν
κι όποιος δεν έχ' στην ξενιτιά, τα ξένα δε φουβάτι
κι όποιος δεν έχει στου στρατό τα βόλια δεν τουν πιάνουν
κι όποιος δεν έχ' στη μαύρη γη του Χάρου δε φουβάτι.
Κι ιγώ η μαύρη η μάνα πο' 'χω στην ξενιτιά τα ξένα τα φουβάμι
κι ιγώ που έχω στου στρατό τα βόλια τα φουβάμι
κι 'γω πο' 'χου στη μαύρη γη του Χάρο του φουβάμι.
(Goula, Evgenia, Peta Artas, 2016)

Extract 8

-“Death, don't grab me from the hair, just grab me from the and I have something to say, something to ask for: I have to tell my mother to wait for me no more neither at night nor in the afternoon”.

- «Χάρε μου αφ'σέ μ' απ' τα μαλλιά και πιάσε μ' απ' το χέρι, έχω ένα λόγο για να πω, λόγο να παραγγείλω: Να πάω να πω στη μάνα μου να μη με περιμένει, μην περιμένει αποβραδί' ούτε και μισημέρι».

(Barka, Vasiliki, Melissourgoi Artas, 2001)

Extract 9

Foreign land is boring, worse than Death himself and separation in life has no consolation.

Τα ξένα είναι βαρετά χειρότερο απ' το Χάρο κι ο ζωντανός ο χωρισμός παρηγοριά δεν έχει.⁶

(Politsou, Eleni (Nakio), 2016)

Functionality

The texts of Arta 's laments have specific references to the ritual of death, expressed by referring to the loss of the deceased, with scenes from his life, with the pain it causes to his relatives and the people close to him. These are texts whose functionality is clarified.

On the other hand, the texts of laments of the communities of the Ioannina prefecture, do not necessarily refer to this particular ritual. These are songs whose semantic content is mainly about emigration. Regarding the functionality, as reported by the mourners, these same songs are also sung in weddings, especially when the bride leaves her father's house. Consequently, in these cases, we have songs which, according to their functionality, are classified at the same time as Wedding Songs and as Laments, while, regarding their semantic content, they are classified as Emigration Songs.

Conclusions

In this article we attempted to clarify the woman's role during the death rituals in the region of Epirus. Nowadays, in traditional societies, women still have a primary role in this difficult task, that has as an ultimate act the final conversation with the deceased and the Underworld that he is going to meet. This communication takes place on the day of the funeral, from breaking dawn to the time of the ceremony, as well as in the next days in the memorial of the dead.

In addition, the connection between the evolutionary course and the relation between a human and his deceased was established, a relation that goes on similar references from the Homeric years to

⁶ A song of emigration, which in the region of Ioannina is also sung as a lament in funerals.

nowadays. The analysis of the verses of the laments, of those patterns concerning the communication with Charos and the Underworld, is the key element of this study as a presumption of this evolutionary relation over time.

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Ламброс Ефтимии

Женско нарицање у посмртним церемонијама у Епиру. Последњи тренутак опраштања

Постхумне церемоније представљају древни обичај код разних народа. Већ нам је познато да су, од најстаријих времена, блиски рођаци, углавном жене, задужени за нарицање за покојником. Није јасно како су се погребни ритуали одржали кроз векове, од старине па све до сора. У области Епира, све до данас, ови обреди се одржавају у многим заједницама. Као основно средство изражавања свих манифестација човековог друштвеног живота, певање је, такође, у овом случају, интегрални део посмртних обичаја. Јадиковање, женско нарицање представља последњи разговор с преминулим и прати га све до места његовог коначног починка.

У овом чланку, настојимо да разјаснимо улогу жене у посмртним обредима у области Епира и, посебно, њену везу с нарицањем у последњем тренутку опраштања. Затим, испитујемо мотиве Харона (Смрти) и Хада у нарицању, везу живих и Подземља, као и њихов разговор. Жена нарикача преузима на себе тежак терет ове комуникације.

Кључне речи: нарицање, посмртне церемоније, Харон, Подземље, Епир, западна Грчка