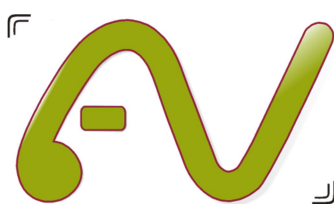


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CONSIDERATIONS ON SOME ANCIENT REMINISCENCES PERSISTING IN THE CEREMONIES FOR TAMING THE DEATH PRESENT IN FUNERAL RITUALS

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Rezumat. Istoria o scriu învingătorii, dar învingătorul suprem este Moartea. De-a lungul timpului oamenii ajuns la certitudinea că singura direcție spre care merg toți este aceea spre moarte, mai devreme sau mai târziu. Cândva, în antichitatea greacă, spre sfârșitul civilizației grecești zeul morții, Hades, se metamorfozează, își schimbă înfățișarea și modul de a-și face cunoscută puterea. El capătă o înfricoșătoare care coboară din cer în plină zi pe Pământ pentru a răpi sufletele oamenilor. Probabil de aceea nu se vorbește moartea de rău, cele mai multe persoane numind-o simplu *Moarte*, fără alte apelative. În imaginarul muribunzilor ea apare în diverse forme, motiv pentru care oamenii au încercat să îmbuneze moartea prin diverse practici. Lucrarea de față se oprește asupra acestor aspecte legate de îmbunare a Morții ce se regăsesc în ritualul roman de înmormântare, dar și în practicile actuale în care sub haina creștinismului s-au perpetuat practici de adorare a unor divinități ce au legătură cu Infernul antic.

Cuvinte cheie: reminescentă, moarte, Hades, Infern, lumea de apoi.

History is written by the victors and the supreme winner is the Death. People came in time to the belief that the only direction to which everybody are going sooner or later is death. At one moment, in ancient Greece, towards the end of the Greek civilization, the God of Death, Hades, is metamorphosed and changes his aspect and way of making his power known. He receives a frightening image, as he comes on Earth down from the sky in clear daylight and steals the souls of mortals. He is sometimes depicted riding a black horse and having children tied at his waist; he leads the youngsters in front and the elderly are crawled behind him¹. For this reason probably, people should not talk ill of the death, most people referring to is simply as *the Death*² without any other appellation. The Death appears in many forms in the imagination of the dying so people tried to tame her by many rituals. The present paper focuses on some aspects concerning the taming rituals of the Death present in the Roman funeral rituals as well as in present rituals which, under the coat of Christianity, perpetuated the worshipping of some deities related to the ancient Inferno.

The concept of Death is thus personified as an unbiased deity who takes away

¹ Vasilescu, 1982, p. 285.

² Grigorovici Marta, 79 years, Sadova Nouă.

the soles of people just like some horrible diseases that were identified with the Death (the plague, cholera). The Death appears to the dying as a hideous and ugly old woman, bony, with sunken eyes, holding a scythe in her hands³ who invites people to drink a bitter drink from a cup– the water of death. During a field research in the villages situated in the valley of river Timiș, in 2015, we determined that this image is still perpetuated and appears under several names such as: *Alduita Domnului*⁴ (the Blessed of the Lord), *Moarcea*⁵ (the Death), *Strâmba*⁶ (the Crooked), *Ciuma*⁷ (the Plague), *Aia cu coasa*⁸ (the one with the scythe). Death comes in different ways to different people, she is deceitful, appearing under various forms and makes people behave differently: *some shake, some grimace, some climb on walls*⁹. *A crooked ugly person, with only 2 teeth, humpbacked, holding a scythe*¹⁰ is probably the last image that the dying see, terrifying them as she comes tingling: *one laughs, another grimaces, some cry, some put their hand to their eyes, screaming, moaning; some look at a corner of the wall and say she is coming, she is coming, she is killing me, she is taking me; to others she comes in their sleep; other call out for their children*¹¹, *others call their departed parents*¹², *or grandchildren, or other close relatives*¹³; *one stared at a corner of the ceiling and started to kick*¹⁴ (*iiiu țușice mumau, ice pă sora Solomia - -...uice-o colo în colț... stă șî să uită la mine... tu nu o vedz, da io o văd*¹⁵ - in rural Romanian dialect: “oh dear, here is sister Solomia -a dead neighbour- there she sits in the corner... she sits there and is looking at me... you cant see her, but I can”). Others see the persons they have killed, *people who were evil in life have an ugly death*¹⁶, others see the persons they have hurt (... *beware of that girl! See what she is doing, as her hair is gets in the food she is cooking – it was a girl he killed*¹⁷). Death may appear *under the shape of fire or a fly*¹⁸; *others pass quietly*¹⁹, *as God allows*²⁰.

³ Ciubotaru, 1999, p. 30.

⁴ Hurduzeu Ana, 48 years, Armeniș.

⁵ Jurca Silvia, 69 years, Bolvașnița; Rada Maria, 64 years, Bucușnița; Bona Crucea, 61 years, Ilova; Guia Maria, 69 years, Poiana; Roma Maria, 67 years, Slatina; Spunci Ioan, 70 years, Vălișoara; Dragomir Teodosia, 62 years, Vârciorova.

⁶ Radu Ioan, 84 years, Buchin.

⁷ Corici Solomon, 75 years, Valea Timișului.

⁸ Belciu Ana, 62 years, Bucușnița.

⁹ Mihaiescu Floarea, 83 years, Prisian.

¹⁰ Dragomir Teodosia, 62 years, Vârciorova.

¹¹ Mihaiescu Floarea, 83 years Prisian.

¹² Dragomir Stanca, 67 years, Armeniș.

¹³ Hurduzeu Ana, 48 years, Armeniș; Corici Ana, 72 de years, Valea Timișului.

¹⁴ Popescu Ana, 73 years, Bolvașnița; Dragomir Stanca, 67 years, Armeniș; Metea Rusălina, 85 years, Vârciorova.

¹⁵ Gheorghevici Dragalina, 75 years, Prisian.

¹⁶ Godeanu Petria, 60 years, Armeniș.

¹⁷ Metea Rusălina, 85 years, Vârciorova.

¹⁸ Blaj Antoaneta, 63 years, Bucușnița.

¹⁹ Roma Maria, 67 years, Slatina.

²⁰ Spunci Maria, 83 years, Vălișoara.

The imagination as well as the testimonials of some persons in near death situations gave Death a face and a gender; she is a woman, some say she is young and beautiful, some say she is an ugly old woman. There is nevertheless a general consensus that the dying *used to lay ill, nowadays they hardly do*²¹ and that *she appears ugly and frowns to sinners*²² and *those who are pure die nicely*²³ and *see relatives or neighbours on the ceiling*²⁴. The Death comes thus under different forms to different people. People die according to their behaviour in life or how the Faiths bestowed upon them at their birth. The Faiths play a very important role, being an active part in the life of people ever since their birth until death and even after that²⁵. The Faith, Fate and especially the Death are three characters which bring fear in the hearts of people, for which reason death must be tamed. It must be mentioned that the third Faith, frequently called the Death, is often named the *Lame* (this name is present also in the case of the *Iele*, other Romanian mythical creatures) and has the role of establishing the moment and the way in which people die²⁶. *Each die according to the way it was bestowed upon them: one in the gallows, another drowned, one by the blade ... it is according to the three Faiths, the two elderly are good, but the youngest is wicked, she is full of hate ... she holds the thread, so people say, this is where the thread ends, you must die*²⁷. The Faiths are *holy women who fulfil the will of God*²⁸, under no circumstances divinity can change what they decided for people²⁹. The lameness of the death is not accidental and must be seen in the context of the mythical and ritual lameness which marked those who travelled to the underworld, the soothsayers or clairvoyants. Keeping guard at the limit between life and death, being and nonbeing, the Death patronizes the passage in the realm of the shadows as well as the coming of the souls from the nothingness between humans³⁰.

The Death (Atropos) as an infernal creature is associated to fatal deities: Hermes, Persephone, Hecate and Nemesis³¹. The funeral aspect makes reference to the Moon, heavenly body where the souls of the dead find their peace³². The Death is honoured even today by offerings and at “remembrance feasts for the dead” food is placed for the Death in a corner of the table, just as at the “table of the Faiths” prepared at childbirth. All these are grounded on the birth-death similarity, but considered passageways situated at the border between the two realms: of the living and of the dead. The souls

²¹ Dragomir Teodosia, 62 years, Vârciorova.

²² Bona Crucița, 61 years, Ilova.

²³ Bejeriță Nastașia, 83 ani, Buceșnița.

²⁴ Guia Maria, 69 years, Poiana; Corici Solomon, 75 de years, Valea Timișului.

²⁵ Hurduzeu, 2016.

²⁶ Lorinț, Belcin Pleșca, 1993, p. 46.

²⁷ Nicoară Cădariu Maria, 83 de years, Prisian.

²⁸ Dodds, 1998, p. 17.

²⁹ Bîrlea, 1981, p. 63.

³⁰ Hurduzeu, 2018.

³¹ De Angeli, 1991, p. 105-106.

³² Nemeti, 1999, p. 216.

of children come from the world where the souls of the dead go, for this reason Death is symbolized by elements from the field of birth³³.

The triad of the faiths corresponds to the triple feminine circumstance of the Goddess Hecate³⁴ - goddess of all the creatures of the Earth and of the under-earth, who is both good and evil³⁵. The triple representation of the Fate in Romanian culture, as well as the triplicate image of Hecate, symbolizes the mythical substrate of the human destiny, always at crossroads, always unsteady, always having to choose³⁶. Hecate is the goddess of the crossroads – places considered especially suited for magic³⁷, and the protector of misunderstandings. The origin of the cult of Hecate is uncertain, according to some researchers being of Thracian origin and to others being ancient Hellenic, as the guardian deity of children, hunters and fishermen³⁸.

In the village Valea Timișului the Death was given special respect, having her own feast: *Baba Ria had three lambs: she sacrificed one as offering for God, another as offering for the Death and another at the feast of the house. When I was a child, she was the only person preserving these rituals ... she gave us a board in the middle of the road ... and the children shouted May God Receive to God or may Death receive to the Death according to what the old woman said and children hit the board with spoons*³⁹. In ancient Greece, it was customary in Athens at the end of each month to place vessels with food at crossroads for the Goddess Hecate, food which was eaten by the poor⁴⁰. People also placed at crossroads statues representing a woman with tree bodies or three heads and people from the rural areas used to give offerings which they placed near the statues⁴¹. It is interesting to notice the role of the goddess and her animas in protecting the defenceless: babies, children, the crazy and the needy⁴². She was given as offerings: dogs, honey, black sheep and fish – symbols of chthonic deities⁴³. She was worshiped as the three headed or three bodied goddess having three different postures or three simultaneous representations⁴⁴. The fact that her favourite animal is the dog is at the origin of the popular belief that the howling of the dog indicates the smell of the Death brought by Hecate⁴⁵.

In order to have an easy passage to the afterlife, people must pay their respects to the Death (Atropos) their entire lives by bringing offerings. People in the rural areas accept the first two Faiths with resignation, knowing that fate cannot be changed as it

³³ Coman, 1991, p. 59.

³⁴ Petre, Lițu, Pavel, 2011, p. 187.

³⁵ Vulcănescu, 1987, p. 164.

³⁶ Vulcănescu, 1987, p. 164.

³⁷ Balaci, 1969, p. 172.

³⁸ Kernbach, 1989, p. 216.

³⁹ Corici Solomon, 75 years, Valea Timișului.

⁴⁰ Corici Solomon, 75 years, Valea Timișului.

⁴¹ Grimal, 2001, p. 214.

⁴² Grimal, 2001, p. 214.

⁴³ Ferrari, 2003, p. 402.

⁴⁴ Kernbach, 1989 p. 216.

⁴⁵ Kernbach, 1989, p. 216.

was bestowed upon people at their birth when the Faiths visit them, three days after their birth, and decide what the fate of the new born is. In life, Death must be respected and honoured with offerings during the various festivities throughout the year, so that at the moment of the great passage she doesn't come under an ugly form. People say at the occasion of all remembering ritual feasts: (in rural Romanian dialect): *Să fie pomană la Sf Moarce, lu Sf Înger și lui (defunctului). Prima ia omul Moarcea și are și ea nevoie de pomană*⁴⁶; *la toate pomenile cât ești în viață trebuie să numești Moarcea, ca să nu vină înfiorată îi dai de pomană colacu ăsta să fie Morții mele, să nu vină nșioartă, să nu vină năcâjâtă la mine; Pomana asta să fie în numili lu Dumedzău să mă ferească dă rău. Ailaltă să fie pomană lu X să-i ducă Dumedzău pomană la suflețalu ei ... în toată pomana dă Pașci, dă Crăciun, dă Sămț, 40 de mucenici, ... se face la fel*⁴⁷ – *this is for remembrance at the Sacred Death, for the Saint Angel and to X (the name of the departed). The man takes first the Death and she requires offerings as well. During your lifetime, at all remembering feasts, one must give offerings to Death, so she doesn't come fiercely, you offer her this colac*⁴⁸ *to be in remembrance for my death, so that she doesn't come fiercely or mad at me; this offering should be in the name of God, to protect me from evil. The other should be for the remembrance of X, so God should give her poor soul alms... at the celebration of Easter, Christmas, the Saints, the 40 martyrs ... you should do the same.* Consequently, people try to tame Death during their lifetime so when the time comes, they have an easy death and that in the afterlife their soul have an easy passage to a new stage, under a new form⁴⁹. During the years that the village was hit by misfortunes and many people died, people made remembrance ceremonials at crossroads in order to stop the calamities⁵⁰. During these celebrations people ate lamb and stopped everybody who came home from working the field and fed them⁵¹. The importance of the crossroads is universal; it is considered a symbol of the centre of the universe, a place of meeting ones destiny. The Romans observed the cult of the Lares at crossroads to avoid a bad destiny⁵². The Romans held in January the festivity of Compitalia, a festivity dedicated to the departed, when small shrines or temples were raised at crossroads for the worship of the Lares. Here people brought such offerings as dolls or woollen balls or would sacrifice pigs on the altars from these crossroads, people believing that they were gathering places for the souls of the dead⁵³.

All mythologies of Indo-European origin (and not only) have deities of destiny who have power over the pre-existence, the life and the death of people and which are most of the time represented as feminine deities with collective character. Christianity

⁴⁶ Bărbulescu Ana, 58 years, Goleț.

⁴⁷ Dragomir Stanca, 67 years, Armeniș.

⁴⁸ Traditional Romanian yeast bread, served or offered during ritual remembrance meals.

⁴⁹ Lorinț, Kahane, 1968, p. 183.

⁵⁰ Corici Solomon, 75 years, Valea Timișului.

⁵¹ Stan Alexandria, 80 years, Ilova.

⁵² Chevalier, Geerbrant, 1995, p. 150.

⁵³ Ghinoiu, 2004, p. 177.

made a series of compromises to annihilate old pagan beliefs, replacing pagan festivities with Christian ones and changing in time the meaning of the pagan festivities and celebrations with the Christian ones⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ Ghinoiu, 2004, p. 27-29.

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