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## MARRIAGE, BIRTH AND DEATH IN THE BELIEFS AND RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS OF ANCIENT GREEKS

**Summary:** The family – in the past and today – remains the basic nuclear family. Since the topic is very extensive, only three aspects of the family life are covered: marriage, the birth of a child and the death of a family member. In these moments, an important part was the beliefs of the ancient Greeks. On the wedding day, all the rituals were carefully fulfilled. For good fortune, sacrifices were made to the gods, and on the day of the wedding at night, they wandered with torches for the joy of Hestia and to drive off the nightly spirits. When the child was born, the mother had to perform a ritual purification. But accepting a newborn child depended on the father. If he accepted the child, he walked around the hearth, the domain of Hestia. Death is an inseparable moment in every family. What were the family's duties for the gods and deceased ancestors? They tried to provide the grave with all the important things, so that the soul would safely go to Hades. The family provided a honey cake for Cerber's dog and an obolon for Charon. In a Greek family, religion was important and was an inseparable element in ancient Greece.

**Keywords:** family, ancient Greece, religion, gods, marriage, birth, death, funeral, beliefs.

The family today, as in ancient Greece, remains the fundamental social unit. The function of the family in the ancient Hellenes was best expressed by Pericles in his funeral speech commemorating the fallen in the Peloponnesian war. He wished to comfort the families whose husbands, fathers, sons, brothers or grandchildren had been taken by the war, saying:

bear up in the hope of other children, those of you whose age yet allows you to have them. For to yourselves individually those who are subsequently born will be a reason for your forgetting those who are no more; and to the state it will be beneficial in two ways, by its not being depopulated, and by the enjoyment of security; for it is not possible that those should offer any fair and just advice, who do not incur equal risk with their neighbours by having children at stake.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.44, transl. H. Dale, New York 1873.

The family was supposed to procreate. For a Greek polis, a child was a potential soldier who would safeguard the country's security in the future. Father and mother also saw in their children the possibility of extending the family and someone to support them in old age, but the religious aspect was also perceived, because when the parents left this world and their souls approached the gates of Hades, it was the offspring who would take over the duties of worshipping the dead.<sup>2</sup>

Religion and related beliefs had a huge impact on the Greek family. In this religion, gods were given a human appearance and character. The image of the gods in a human form was ridiculed by Xenophanes, writing that people think that: "gods are born, wear their own clothes and have a voice and body."<sup>3</sup> He did not acknowledge that Zeus and other deities looked like the Greeks, because – as he argued – a black man would imagine the gods with black skin.<sup>4</sup> He went further and said that the animals also imagined the gods in their own image.<sup>5</sup> He held a grudge against Homer and Hesiod saying that: "have attributed to the gods all sorts of things which are matters of reproach and censure among men: theft, adultery, and mutual deceit."<sup>6</sup> The author outlined the difference between the world of mortals and the world of gods. Immortals could cheat or commit adultery while maintaining impunity. In the image of the Greeks, the human world worked differently, because each act brought about certain consequences. An example of such family drama may be the story of Hippolytus, whose fate was presented by Euripides in his play. In the myth, specific actions of heroes led to a family tragedy, and all because of the revenge of Aphrodite, who took revenge on the hero when he refused to give her due adoration. However, instead of taking revenge on him directly, she did it through Phaedra, his young wife and Theseus, his father. The goddess of love aroused feelings in her for Hippolytus. When the young man rejected her love, she decided to take her own life. Before she committed suicide, she left a message for her husband that his son had raped her. Moreover, Phaedra's deceit caused misery for Hippolytus and his father. Theseus found out about the death of his wife and read the message with false accusations. He then cast a curse on his son. Through Poseidon – who listened to Theseus' words – Hippolytus falls under the hooves of the horses of his chariot. Dying Hippolytus is brought to his father, and then Artemis comes and tells Theseus the truth. His son dies, and he himself is in despair. In this tragedy, each decision brings consequences for the whole family. Gods are not burdened with consequences. At Euripides Artemis announced vengeance

<sup>2</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu*, Warszawa 1983, p. 201–202.

<sup>3</sup> Xenophanes of Colophon, *Fragments*, transl. J. H. Lesher, Toronto 2001, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, fr. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, fr. 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, fr. 11.

on Aphrodite for the death of Hippolytus. Artemis said that: “mortal of hers that she loves the most I shall punish with these ineluctable arrows shot from my hand.”<sup>7</sup> Revenge was not meant to reach directly the goddess of love, but one of her mortal admirers, who was not guilty of anything. Another example of a different family of mortals from the immortal family is Heracles. Zeus was sleeping with his mother, Alcmena, but jealous Hera did not take revenge on the unfaithful divine spouse, but on the mortal child. When he was still a little child, she allegedly sent two snakes to take his life.<sup>8</sup> When he started a family, he fell into madness by Hera and he killed his wife and children. Euripides wrote that: “Hera wishes to brand him with the guilt of shedding kindred blood by slaying his own children...”<sup>9</sup> The family of the gods and the family of the people differed not only in immortality and power, but also in the lack of responsibility for their deeds, because the gods did not bear any consequences. However, these two worlds were combined by monogamy and patriarchy.<sup>10</sup> Gods and people were limited to having one wife, but they did not bother to have many sexual partners. In the hierarchy of the gods, Zeus enjoyed the supreme position, and the rest of the gods were subordinate to him. The situation in the human family was similar.

### Wedding

The father, as head of the family, had a dominant position at home. He had almost unlimited power over the children, who had to obey their father. Dying Herakles in Sophocles’ *Trachis* said that obeying the father was one of the most important unwritten laws (gr. ‘νόμος’).<sup>11</sup> He wanted to convince his son Hyllus to take an oath. When his son did that, his father ordered him to marry one of the captured brides. Hyllus was reluctant, but he agreed.<sup>12</sup> Demosthenes wrote in one of his court speeches:

As for me, he forthwith persuaded me, for I was about eighteen years of age, to marry the daughter of Euphemus, wishing to live to see children born to me.

<sup>7</sup> Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 1420–1422, transl. D. Kovacs, Cambridge [n.p.d.], w: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0106%3Acard%3D1389>>.

<sup>8</sup> Euripides, *Heracles*, 1266–1268, transl. E.P. Coleridge, New York 1938, w: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0102%3Acard%3D1255>>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, 832–833.

<sup>10</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje*, p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> Sophocles, *Trachiniai*, 1177–1178, transl. Sir R. Jebb, Cambridge 1892, w: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0196%3Acard%3D1157>>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, 1249–1251.

I, men of the jury, as before, so especially then, when these men were beginning to annoy him with lawsuits and were proving troublesome, thought that I, on the contrary, ought to strive to gladden him by doing everything whereby I could give him pleasure, and so obeyed him.<sup>13</sup>

Choosing a wife for the son by the father was not a rule, but often the son could follow the advice his father gave him.<sup>14</sup> In Athens, a man could get married at the age of eighteen, but often waited until the end of his military service, which was until the age of twenty.<sup>15</sup> When he found a suitable candidate for himself, there was a formal engagement (gr. ‘ἐγγύησις’). There was a meeting between the groom and the girl’s father or her legal guardian if the father was not alive.<sup>16</sup> Details of the dowry were settled and, in the end, hands were shaken. The girl’s presence was not required, neither was her consent, as it was the father who made all the decisions. Girls usually married when they reached physical maturity, between twelve to fifteen years of age.<sup>17</sup> The ultimate goal was the marriage (‘γάμος’) in which the spouse left her parents and went to her future husband’s house. But the day before, the bride and groom had to take a ritual bath in their homes. In Athens, water was drawn from the spring of Calirrhoe.<sup>18</sup> At night, a boy related to the spouses, heading towards the source, played the flute while leading a group of women carrying water in *loutrophoros* (gr. ‘λουτροφόρος’ – ‘bath-carrier’<sup>19</sup>) and torches. The procession of women was probably followed by the future bride, but most likely her presence was not necessary.<sup>20</sup> The groom’s presence was probably even less frequent, since carrying water was not a male task.<sup>21</sup> Most likely, the groom took a ritual bath in a nearby river. As Euripides wrote in his tragedy: “Ismenus had no part at your wedding in supplying the luxurious bath, and there was silence through the streets of Thebes, at the entrance of your bride.”<sup>22</sup> These words were said by suffering Jocasta, because her son was married abroad, away from the family, so

<sup>13</sup> Demostenes, *Against Boeotus* 2, 40.12-13, transl. A. T. Murray, London 1939, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0076%3Aspeech%3D40%3Asection%3D12>>.

<sup>14</sup> R. Flaceliere, *Życie codzienne w Grecji za czasów Peryklesa*, transl. Z Bobowicz, Warszawa 1985, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje*, p. 208.

<sup>17</sup> R. Flaceliere, *Życie codzienne w Grecji*, 59.

<sup>18</sup> Thucydides, *The History*, 2.15.

<sup>19</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje*, p. 210.

<sup>20</sup> C. Reinsberg, *Obyczaje seksualne starożytnych Greków*, transl. B. Wierzbicka, Gdynia 1998, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 347–349, transl. E.P. Coleridge, New York 1937, w: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0118%3Acard%3D327>>.

the ritual bath did not take place in the river flowing through the family Thebes. The ritual bath was probably supposed to promote fertility. This way the spouses could expect that the water bath ritual would provide them with offspring, as water was the giver of all life.<sup>23</sup> The bride was still sacrificing her toys and other items related to her childhood to Artemis.<sup>24</sup> As for the celibate heroes, she would sacrifice a lock of hair. Pausanias reports that in Troezen “every maiden before marriage cuts off a lock for Hippolytus, and, having cut it, she brings it to the temple and dedicates it.”<sup>25</sup> There is such a custom in this city is confirmed by Euripides.<sup>26</sup> The premarital offering of your hair is confirmed in Megara and Delos.<sup>27</sup> By sacrificing the lock of hair for the celibate heroes, it is rather a habit to say goodbye to your childhood than to the wedding itself.<sup>28</sup>

The day after all these rituals, a feast began. The bride’s father announced that his daughter would now be sacrificing to her husband’s ancestors.<sup>29</sup> In the era of Pericles or Plato, the feast was only an inauguration, because in the evening after it finished, the girl walked from her father’s house to the house (gr. ‘οἶκος’) of her future husband. Then a ceremonial cortege set off, traveling on foot or on wagons. The newlyweds’ wagon was pulled by mules. The groom was driving the wagon, and the bride was sitting next to him. A crowd of women and men surrounded them.<sup>30</sup> In front of the wagon there was a woman walking with torches in her hand, most probably the mother of the bride,<sup>31</sup> and the groom’s mother waited for the young couple at home. She was also holding a torch in hand.<sup>32</sup> Clytemnestra thought that the daughter of Iphigenia would marry Achilles, so she wished to set out with the torch at the head of the wedding retinue. Agamemnon really wanted to sacrifice his own child and tried to discourage her from it, saying that he would do it himself, to which Clytemnestra commented: “And leave my child? Then who will raise her bridal torch? [...] That is not the custom; but you think lightly of these things.”<sup>33</sup> Again, Jocasta proba-

<sup>23</sup> C. Reinsberg, *Obyczaje*, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> R. Flaceliere, *Życie codzienne w Grecji*, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.32.1, transl. W.H.S. Jones, London 1918, in: *Crane, G.R. ed. The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Paus.+2.32.1&fromdoc=P+erseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0160>>.

<sup>26</sup> Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 1423–1427.

<sup>27</sup> Pausanias, *Description*, 1.43.4.

<sup>28</sup> C. Reinsberg, *Obyczaje*, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> A. Wypustek, *Życie rodzinne starożytnych Greków*, Wrocław 2007, p. 64.

<sup>30</sup> C. Reinsberg, *Obyczaje*, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje*, p. 213.

<sup>32</sup> M. Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law: Law, Society, and Politics in Fifth-Century Athens*, Berkeley 1987, p. 96.

<sup>33</sup> Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 732; 734, transl. E. P. Coleridge, London 1891, in: *Crane, G.R. ed. The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0108%3Acard%3D716>>.

bly mentions that she would like to wait at home for the wedding cortege with a torch in her hand, but she suffered because her son was married in exile, away from his homeland. She said that: “I was not the one who lit for you the marriage-torch, the custom in marriage for a happy mother.”<sup>34</sup> The torch at the wedding could have a protective function.<sup>35</sup> As Platon’s comic writer wrote: *great Gods* (gr. ‘δαίμων’ – deity, supernatural power) *above dislike the smell of lamps* (gr. ‘λύχνος’ – lamp).<sup>36</sup> The torch could also symbolize life and Hestia, the goddess of fireside.<sup>37</sup> During the celebration, songs could be heard. They referred to Hymen, the god of marriage. One of Sappho’s songs is as follows: “High! Raise the roof! O Hymen. Lift it up, carpenters! O Hymen. The bridegroom is coming, the equal of Aris. O Hymen. Taller than a giant! O Hymen!”<sup>38</sup> When the cortege arrived, the groom carried his bride over the threshold. The custom was meant to emphasize the role of the wife, which was different from other women who crossed the threshold of the house.<sup>39</sup> But it could also be a remnant of an old habit of the robbery of the abduction of the spouse,<sup>40</sup> that was still alive in Sparta.<sup>41</sup> The mother of the bride walking earlier in the cortege with the torch, also kindled fire in the fireplace in the house of newlyweds<sup>42</sup>. This shows the bond between the two families and that Hestia was brought home with the newlyweds. A Homeric hymn says “for without you mortals hold no banquet, — where one does not duly pour sweet wine in offering to Hestia both first and last.”<sup>43</sup> From the moment the fire was kindled, the newlywed wife began living with her husband and – as the hymn shows – the Hestia goddess had to receive regular sacrifices. After making the fire and the husband walking the wife around it. Later sacrifices were made for ancestors.<sup>44</sup> The householders then showered the newlyweds with dried fruit or coins, manifesting their wish for pro-

<sup>34</sup> Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 344–346.

<sup>35</sup> M. Aguirre, *Erinyes as Creatures of Darkness*, in: *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, ed. M. Christopoulos, New York 2010, p. 137.

<sup>36</sup> Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, 11.58, transl. C.D. Yonge, London 1854, in: *Crane, G.R. ed. The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Ath.+11.58&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2013.01.0003>>.

<sup>37</sup> A. Wypustek, *Życie rodzinne*, p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> W. Barnstone, *The Complete Poems of Sappho*, Boston 2009, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje*, p. 213.

<sup>40</sup> R. Flaceliere, *Życie codzienne w Grecji*, p. 62.

<sup>41</sup> Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 15.3, transl. B. Perrin, London 1914, in: *Crane, G.R. ed. The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plut.+Lyc.+15.3&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0047>>.

<sup>42</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje*, p. 213.

<sup>43</sup> *Hymn 29 to Hestia*, 5–7, in: H.G. Evelyn-White, *Anonymous. The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, in: *Crane, G.R. ed. The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=HH%2029>>.

<sup>44</sup> A. Wypustek, *Życie rodzinne*, p. 68–69.

sperity.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps it was as if it was a sacrifice for the deity to gain their favour.<sup>46</sup> The husband and wife then went to the marriage chamber, and at the door were to sing the wedding hymns and make noise, believing that it would scare away evil spirits.<sup>47</sup> On the first days after the wedding, the marriage worshipped the deities associated with love and marriage. They were sacrificed, for example, to loutrophoroses, used for the spouses in a ritual bath before wedding.<sup>48</sup>

## Birth

The birth of a child was also connected to the Greek beliefs. Before the baby was born, the house was smeared with tar. It was believed that this would protect the house from being defiled. When it was a difficult childbirth, in difficult moments relief was brought by Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth, identified with Artemis.<sup>49</sup> The mother and the inhabitants of the house were defiled, and it was necessary to purify on the fifth, seventh<sup>50</sup> or tenth day.<sup>51</sup> On this day, sacrifices were made to the gods and ritual washings were made. The midwife also had to undergo purification.<sup>52</sup> Electra, wanting to deceive Clytemnestra, her mother, wanted to convince her that she had given birth to a son, and “has given birth and stayed pure.”<sup>53</sup> Electra said to her mother: “please sacrifice – for I do not know how – on the tenth day, as is the custom for the child. For I have no experience, being childless before.”<sup>54</sup> Her mother replies that “this is work for another, the one who delivered you.”<sup>55</sup> Electra told her that she had given birth without the help of a midwife, and so the mother agreed to sacrifice to the gods. After cleansing, on the tenth day after the birth of the baby, there was a ceremony called Amphidromia, where the ritual of the adoption of the newborn to the family was held. The father took the baby in his hands and decided to take the child “running round with it in a circle”<sup>56</sup> around the fireside, so the

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje*, p. 213.

<sup>47</sup> R. Flaceliere, *Życie codzienne w Grecji*, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> C. Reinsberg, *Obyczaje*, p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje*, p. 221.

<sup>50</sup> R. Flaceliere, *Życie codzienne w Grecji*, p. 75.

<sup>51</sup> L.B. Zaidman, *Grecy i ich bogowie*, transl. B. Spieralska, Warszawa 2008, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 16–17.

<sup>53</sup> Euripides, *Electra*, 654, transl. W.J. Oates, New York 1938, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0096%3Acar d%3D646>>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, 1125–1127.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, 1128.

<sup>56</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 160e–161a, transl. H.N. Fowler, London 1921, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0172%3Atext%3DTheat.%3Asection%3D160e>>.

goddess Hestia saw everything. During this ritual, the child was finally accepted into the family.

If the father did not accept the child, then he did not raise it in his hands or carry it around the fireside. Unrecognized children in ancient Greece were abandoned.<sup>57</sup> Plato describing this ritual puts the following question in Socrates' mouth: "you think that any offspring of yours ought to be cared for and not abandoned [...]?"<sup>58</sup> In order not to give birth to an unwanted baby, decisions to induce miscarriage were made. Aristotle wrote about inducing miscarriage "before it has developed sensation and life."<sup>59</sup> Plutarch also wrote about miscarriage in the context of Sparta.<sup>60</sup> Polibius in the Hellenistic era wrote that in his opinion the scale of abandoning children was pathological in size. He wrote that:

for this evil grew upon us rapidly, and without attracting attention, by our men becoming perverted to a passion for show and money and the pleasures of an idle life, and accordingly either not marrying at all, or, if they did marry, refusing to rear the children that were born, or at most one or two out of a great number, for the sake of leaving them well off or bringing them up in extravagant luxury.<sup>61</sup>

There were also preferences for the gender of the child. Greek poet Poseidippos wrote that: "everyone, even if he is poor, raises a son, but abandons a daughter, even if he is rich."<sup>62</sup> A letter from the first century BC, addressed to a wife says that: "If, as may well happen, you give birth to a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, abandon it."<sup>63</sup> Interesting information about Sparta was provided by prof. Lidia Winniczuk, namely, that: "Healthy babies in Sparta were not gotten rid of."<sup>64</sup> In Sparta, this custom was different than in other states, because the fate of the child was not decided upon by the father, but a special committee that examined the child in terms of health, rejecting only weak

<sup>57</sup> L.B. Zaidman, *Grecy I ich bogowie*, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 160e–161a.

<sup>59</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 7.1335b, transl. H. Rackham, London 1944, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Aristot.+Pol.+7.1335b&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0058>>.

<sup>60</sup> Plutarch, *Lacaenarum Apophthegmata*, 6.26, transl. F.C. Babbitt, London 1931, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plut.+Lacae.+6.26&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0204>>.

<sup>61</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, 37.9, transl. E. S. Shuckburgh, London 1962, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plb.+37.9&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0234>>.

<sup>62</sup> L. Foxhall, *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity*, New York 2003, p. 53.

<sup>63</sup> L.S. Milner, *Hardness of Heart/hardness of Life: The Stain of Human Infanticide*, New York 2000, p. 227.

<sup>64</sup> L. Winniczuk, *Ludzie, zwyczaje i obyczaje starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu*, p. 226.



or sick children.<sup>65</sup> Religion or morality did not condemn the abandonment of a child.<sup>66</sup> Greek mythology knows many such cases, for example, King Oedipus.

## Funerals

Another important event for the family was death, followed by the funeral of a loved one. A dying man and his psyche – the soul that is “other self”<sup>67</sup> – sets off on a long journey to the Kingdom of Hades. In the religion of the ancient Greeks, the living world and the dead world are very distant, but they can interact with each other. The living could influence the fate of the dead to make them feel better or worse on the other side. Similarly, the other way round, the dead could either help or hinder the life of their family.

The family supplied the dead with the necessary items. The family believed in the possibility that the deceased could make the final trip easier. The motive for the influence of the living world on the dead was payment to the Charon carrier that was usually put into the mouth of the deceased. If the family of the dead believed in the motive of payment for Charon and would not provide the soul with that coin during the funeral, it would not be able to afford the “One way ticket”, and then the soul would forever wander the Styx before it reached its destination.<sup>68</sup> Another important donation for the deceased was the honey cake.<sup>69</sup> Aristophanes wrote that: “O why not finish and die? A bier is easy to buy. A honey-cake I’ll knead you with joy.”<sup>70</sup> Probably this was a reference to an offering for the guard of the Hades gate, the dog Cerberus. However, the author did not explicitly write that it was specifically about the dog Cerberus.<sup>71</sup> But since the deceased was given a coin to be used by them during the journey to the underworld to pay Charon for the passage, the honey cake served as a sacrifice, most likely for Cerberus, as he and Charon meet before the final destination is reached. Some English translations give the text of Aristophanes

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, p. 223.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, p. 225.

<sup>67</sup> E. Rohde, *The Cult of Sould and Belief in Immortality among the Greek*, transl. W.B. Hillis New York 1925, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> D. Białobrzecka, *Obol Charona*, p. 11, in: *Menhir nr 10* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.menhir.archeo.uj.edu.pl/documents/37357302/63575385/obol%20charona1.pdf>>.

<sup>69</sup> E. Rohde, *The Cult of Sould*, p. 161–162, note 111.

<sup>70</sup> Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 599–601, transl. J. Lindsay, in: *Crane, G.R. ed. The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0242%3Acard%3D5%3A98>>.

<sup>71</sup> In the original Greek no name Cerberus: σὺ δὲ δὴ τί μαθὼν οὐκ ἀποθνήσκεις; †χωρίον ἐστί: †σorpὸν ὠνήσει: μελιτοῦτταν ἐγὼ καὶ δὴ μάξω.

in such a way that they suggest that it is clearly about the hellish dog.<sup>72</sup> Sources from later epochs leave no doubt and mention that the honey cake put into the hands of the dead was for Cerberus. It was originally probably just an offering for the gate guard, to make them friendly to the dead arriving in Hades.<sup>73</sup> Hesiod about Cerberus wrote that: “A fearful hound guards the house in front, pitiless, and he has a cruel trick. On those who go in, he fawns with his tail and both his ears, but does not allow them to go out back again, but keeps watch and devours whomever he catches going out of the gates of strong Hades and awful Persephone.”<sup>74</sup> Cerberus at Hesiod would hurt a soul only if they wanted to leave Hades and not enter it. In later epochs, Cerberus’s character was awe-inspiring, and there was a belief that the honey cake for the dead was meant to divert the dog so that even when they entered Hades, there was no trouble for them.<sup>75</sup> The dog was no longer so pleasant to the souls coming to Hades. It was in Cerberus’ Roman times that he saw Virgil, who wrote that:

Here Cerberus, with triple-throated roar, made all the region ring, as there he lay at vast length in his cave. The Sibyl then, seeing the serpents writhe around his neck, threw down a loaf with honeyed herbs imbued and drowsy essences: he, ravenous, gaped wide his three fierce mouths and snatched the bait, crouched with his large backs loose upon the ground, and filled his cavern floor from end to end.<sup>76</sup>

It was important for the Greeks to bury a family member who was provided with everything needed and to perform all necessary cult activities. The body had to be washed, dressed in clean clothes, the head of the dead was decorated with ribbons and wreaths, the women anointed them with oils, etc.<sup>77</sup> Everything was needed for the souls of the dead to have peace.<sup>78</sup>

The Greeks worshipped the souls of their ancestors. In Athens, on the third and ninth day after the funeral, sacrifices were made for them. On the ninth day, the mourning period ended. Funeral rituals prevented evil from affecting the soul. But then they continued to take care of the well-being of the soul of the

<sup>72</sup> ‘A honey-cake to bribe the dog, in: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 603, transl. S. Ruden, Indianapolis 2003.

<sup>73</sup> E. Rohde, *The Cult of Sould*, p. 161–162, note 111.

<sup>74</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 769–774, transl. H. G. Evelyn-White, London 1914, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0130%3Acard%3D767>>.

<sup>75</sup> E. Rohde, *The Cult of Sould*, p. 161.

<sup>76</sup> Vergilius Maro, *Aeneid*, 6.417, transl. C. Williams, Boston 1910, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Verg.+A.+6.417&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0054>>.

<sup>77</sup> E. Rohde, *The Cult of Sould*, p. 123–124.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 212–213.

dead. Thirty days after the death on the grave, a solemn feast was held and then repeated in several thirty-day intervals. The immediate family had to take care of the worship of the dead, and it was the sacred duty of the son as an heir.<sup>79</sup>

Sometimes the family would like to worship the deceased by providing them with a decent burial, but there was no body. A man could drown in the sea, lose his life in a war in a distant country, and their body could not be taken to the homeland. In such cases the family set a cenotaph, which was an empty tomb and called out the name of the deceased three times, so that the restless soul came to the homeland and settled in that empty grave. Odysseus did this when the members of his crew died and he could not take their bodies or take them to their homeland or bury them on the spot. When he set off to the sea: “we had called thrice on each of those hapless comrades of ours who died on the plain, cut down by the Cicones.”<sup>80</sup> The family could then “bring his soul back home.”<sup>81</sup> Vergilius, in his *Eneidy*, did, however, best describe it: “Then my own hands did for thy honour build an empty tomb upon the Trojan shore, and thrice with echoing voice I called thy shade. Thy name and arms are there. But, o my friend, thee could I nowhere find, but launched away, nor o’er thy bones their native earth could fling.”<sup>82</sup> If the family believed in the power of such a ritual, then the family members could calmly worship the dead in place of the empty grave.

## Conclusion

Only three aspects of family life presented: wedding, birth and death, but in a partial form, because the material is too huge. However, the material presented shows that religion had a great impact on the life of an ancient Greek family. The family in every event believed in the presence of the gods. Dead family members were also important. Even after death, the family did not forget about the loved ones, believing that it had an effect on their mortal fate. Religious practices were different for dead people and for gods. People wanted to gain their grace and avoid their wrath. When we learn the life of the ancient Greeks, we must talk about their religion. These aspects cannot be separated.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

<sup>80</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.65-67, transl. A.T. Murray, London 1919, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Hom.+Od.+9.65&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136>>.

<sup>81</sup> Pindar, *Pythian 4*, 161(286), transl. S. J. Willet, 2001, in: Crane, G.R. ed. *The Perseus Project* [online], access: 20.05.2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0033,002:4>>. (The quote is related to the soul of Fryxos, who died away from his homeland).

<sup>82</sup> Vergilius Maro, *Aeneid*, 6.518–525.

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## Małżeństwo, narodziny i śmierć w wierze oraz w zwyczajach religijnych antycznych Greków

**Streszczenie:** Rodzina – dawniej oraz dzisiaj – była i jest podstawową komórką społeczną. Ze względu na ogrom materiału w zakresie podjętego tematu, autor skupił się tylko na trzech aspektach z życia rodziny: zawarcie małżeństwa, narodziny dziecka oraz śmierć członka rodziny. Te momenty życiowe były bardzo ważne dla Greków, bowiem właśnie wtedy odwoływano się do konkretnych rytuałów religijnych. Aby uzyskać pomyślność bogów, zawsze składano im ofiary. Przykładowo, w dniu ślubu w porze nocnej wędrowano z pochodniami ku uciezce Hestii oraz żeby odpędzić nocne i niemiłe bóstwa. Kiedy rodziło się dziecko, matka musiała dokonać rytualnego oczyszczenia. Jednak czy nowo narodzone dziecko miało zostać uznane, zależało tylko od ojca. Jeśli przyjął je do swego domu, obchodził wokół ognisko domowe, którym opiekowała się bogini Hestia. Natomiast jeśli jeden z członków rodziny umierał, dokładano starań, aby do grobu włożyć zmarłemu wszystkie potrzebne mu rzeczy, by mógł bezpiecznie dotrzeć do Hadesu. Pilnowano, by dostał miodowe ciastko dla psa Cerbera, a także obola dla Charona. Religia i związane z nią wierzenia oraz rytuały były nieodłącznie wpisane w codzienne życie mieszkańców starożytnej Grecji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzina, starożytna Grecja, religia, bogowie, ślub, narodziny, śmierć, pogrzeb, wierzenia.

