
THE FUNERAL CUSTOMS IN THE FOLK TRADITIONS OF GREECE AND THE TERRITORY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the parallel interpretation of the funerals, the folk beliefs and the symbolic understandings of funeral customs in the Greek and the folk tradition in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. Most of the Greek funeral customs, as well as those in the Macedonian folk tradition, can be connected with those that were practiced in other people and in other times. Although impression is gained that the ancient funeral customs have been forgotten, they have lived their development thus as they could, with the aim to satisfy the living and to give expression of human grief, pain, enthusiasm and even hope. In the Greek and Macedonian folk traditions, old beliefs and rites are present today as well in these areas. In some places they have been altered as a result of the contemporary views, and in some rural areas are almost identical as in the time when they first appeared. The aim is to show the similarities and differences within the scope of the funeral and magical – ritual actions between these two folk traditions that begin immediately after the death of a loved one and continue until the funeral. This paper will also offer a comparative analysis of the funeral customs between the Greek and the Macedonian folk tradition by observing the rudiments of the funeral customs that were practiced in the past. In certain cases they have been altered as a result of modern views, and in some rural areas they have remained unchanged.

Key words: *Greeks, Republic of Macedonia, burial, funeral customs, folk's beliefs.*

Introduction

Funerals are one of the oldest facets of human culture. Funeral customs memorialize the immortal soul of the deceased. According to the folk beliefs, the soul leaves the body at the time of death and ascends to the immortal body (Митевски, 2005: 67). While every folk tradition practices some funeral actions that correspond to those of the other cultures, they still reflect the particular folk tradition with some of their characteristics. That is why the beliefs and the rituals that are embodied in folk customs have been interpreted as guardians of folk identities.

Comparative analysis of the customs and beliefs in the Greek folk tradition and the folk tradition on the territory of Republic of Macedonia

The Greek and the Macedonian folk traditions have many customs and beliefs regarding the proper preparation of the deceased. These beliefs begin immediately after the death of someone in the family and continue up to the funeral.

In both folk traditions, it is customary to close the eyes of the deceased right after death. According to the folk beliefs in Greece, the eyes of the deceased should be closed by someone in the family so that the deceased “wouldn’t be able to look at or to torture anyone.” (Rode, 1991: 26). According to the folk tradition in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia it is believed that deceased person with open eyes represents a bad omen of a new death in the family (Тановић, 1927: 252). The custom of putting metal coins on the eyes of the deceased has not been perceived in the territory of Greece. This custom, as a rudiment of the ancient custom that had been practiced in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia since the pagan period, has been transmitted to Christianity. It is even practiced in the present time period in the village of Rapesh in the Republic of Macedonia. (Ристески, 1999: 66). Another replica of this custom hasn’t been perceived either in the territory of Greece or in the Republic of Macedonia. The custom of closing the eyes of the deceased is a standard part of funeral rituals in folk traditions around the world.

A custom that has not been perceived in Greece but that is seen in the Macedonian folk tradition is the opening of doors and windows in the house of the deceased as well as waking up the people who are present in the house. According to Macedonian beliefs, people should open the doors and the windows as soon as someone dies. This is done to allow the soul of the deceased to easily leave the house, unhindered. In some parts of Macedonia the doors of the house are not to be closed even after the deceased is taken away. This is according to the folk belief that if the body is taken away and leaves the soul behind the body and the soul will not be able to unite in “the other world” and will remain separated for eternally (Тановић, 1927: 257).

In the classical period of Greece it was customary to turn on the lights in sanctuaries (Parke, 1977: 152). However, the custom of turning the lights on in the room where the deceased rests for forty days after the time of death has not been perceived. The use of light in the Macedonian folk tradition in the cult of the dead symbolized the lighting of the path as the deceased crossed into the underworld (Петковски, 2007: 32). The constant light up to 40 days after the time of death, according to the Macedonian folk beliefs, symbolizes that “there should be light so that the soul doesn’t get lost”. In the Macedonian folk tradition the use of light or a candle is an integral part of funeral customs. This comes from the folk belief that fire guards the deceased from ghosts. In folk civilizations worldwide, lighting candles or icon lamps near graves also represents an important part of funeral customs.

The next custom of interest is the ritual bathing of the deceased. In the Greek folk tradition it was usually the wife of the deceased or a close female relative who performed ritual bathing. When available, salty water was preferred for ritual bathing and for cleaning the wounds of the deceased who had died in battle (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 143). After the body had been bathed, the women covered the body with scented oils (Фласелјер, 2002: 87). Smearing the body with scented oils had an apotropaic aim; banishing the evil forces and demons, while at the same time aiding in quicker burning of the body (Burkert, 1985: 72). Ritual bathing is also an obligatory part of funeral customs in the Macedonian folk tradition. Ritual bathing is performed by people of the same gender. For example, males bath males and females bath females. Before the bathing starts, the closest relatives undress the deceased. If that is not possible they tear the clothes. The act of undressing usually goes from the top downwards, through the legs. According to folk beliefs “it is not good to undress the clothes through the head of the deceased.” The deceased is given a final bath so that he or she “goes clean to God”. In rural parts of the Republic of Macedonia the most important step in this ritual act is spilling the water in which the deceased had been bathed. That water is called “the water of the dead” and had to be spilled somewhere where no one has tread. This is done because it is believed that if anyone has passed over the water, he/she would become ill and die (Ристески, 1999: 39). Rubbing scented oils over the body is not a part of the Macedonian folk tradition. After the arrival of Christianity it became more common to use oil to light the icon lamps during funeral ceremonies in the house, as well as on the grave of the deceased. Although altered, the customs of ritual bathing and oil usage in lighting the icon lamps have been transmitted to modern society. These customs are still utilized in the territory of modern Greece and Macedonia, as well as in various cultures around the world.

After ritual bathing, the ritual dressing of the dead body is performed. In the Greek folk tradition the deceased was dressed in a death shirt. The shirt went down to the ankles and was grey or white by custom. If the deceased had been a soldier, they dressed him into a soldier’s cloak (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 143). After the dressing they wrapped the whole body in ribbons and then in a bed sheet, while the face remained uncovered (Фласелјер, 2002: 87). According to law in Greece it was forbidden to bury anyone who had been dressed in more than three pieces of clothing (Плутарх, *Солон*, 21). In the Macedonian tradition, it was usual to dress the deceased in new clothes. If the family could not afford new clothes, they were dressed in the clothes that they wore while alive, but only on the condition that the clothes had been freshly cleaned (Тановић, 1927: 252). In traditional Macedonian culture, one custom has remained up to the present: upon turning 70, a person prepares one’s own pair of new and unworn clothes as an eternal funeral robe (Ристески, 1999: 40). This is especially prominent among the elderly living in the rural areas in Macedonia, where it is common to prepare one’s material possessions for death. The items typically include a blanket, clothes, shoes, socks, and everything up to the kerchief by which their jaw is going to be tied. The shoes, as part of the personal outfit of the deceased, are usually put into the graves as presents, symbolizing that if the deceased wear shoes, they will arrive more easily in the afterlife (Петковски, 2007: 31). In some parts of the Republic of Macedonia, it is customary to unlace the shoes to make it easier to walk “in the other world”. The custom of preparing clothes and shoes for the dead has almost disappeared nowadays. It can only be found in some rural areas of the Republic of Macedonia, primarily because modern people believe that preparing such clothes invites misfortune. For the same reason modern societies worldwide do not prepare and keep funeral clothes and shoes. Instead, the closest of kin perform this task when needed.

After the dead body has been bathed and dressed, it is customary to adorn the deceased. Numerous archaeological finds and various rings, bracelets, and necklaces give evidence to

the fact that this was common practice in Greece (Фласелјер, 2002: 87-88). In the classic period a diadem used to be put on the head of the deceased and the bodies of the deceased women were adorned with earrings and necklaces. If the deceased was supposed to get married or had been newly married, they adorned him/her in modest wedding jewelry. The hair of the deceased was usually styled the same way as he/she wore it while alive (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 144). In digs throughout the Republic of Macedonia, archaeologists have found various amulets, pendants, earrings, buttons, clasps, and belts made from a variety of materials such as stone, bone, bronze, iron, silver, and gold. These items are commonly found in necropolises (Битракова – Грозданова, 1988: 4-5). Therefore, the custom of adorning the deceased in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia marks continuity from the furthest past up to contemporary society. There is a belief in the Macedonian folk tradition that if the deceased are buried with their wedding rings, the spouses will be together in the “next” world as well. If anyone dies unmarried, a wedding ring is bought and is put on one’s finger, in accordance with the folk beliefs that he/she will find a spouse in the “next” world. Women are traditionally buried with a mirror and a comb, symbolizing that they want to be beautiful in the next life, just as they were while still alive. These traditions are related to the after-life (Петковски, 2007: 31). The custom of adorning the deceased remains a part of the funeral customs in folk societies around the world in modern times. The practice has the same symbolic meaning as in the classical period: to be nice and decent in the “other world” too.

The next ritual act is tying up the mouth of the deceased with a kerchief. The evidence for existence of this custom has been found in the Late Mycenaean sarcophaguses and the funeral vases which date from the Geometrical period (Burkert, 1985: 192). It was customary to place coins in the mouth of the deceased before tying it. This practice was related to the Greek custom of using the mouth as a purse (Аристофан: *Жените во народното собрание*, 818; *Оси*, 609; *Птици*, 503; Теофраст: *Карактери*, б). According to tradition in Greece, the deceased was paying the ferryman Charon to ferry him/her across the River Styx (the river of forgetfulness and oblivion). According to belief, Charon was always charging for his services. Those who were unable to pay were forced to wander eternally along the riverbank and were unable to cross. Alternatively, they returned back to haunt their families who had buried them without dignity. Next, the women tied the head of the deceased with a linen scarf around his/her chin, or left it untied at the back of the head, i.e. at the nape. The aim was to prevent the jaw from opening in belief that if the mouth opened the soul would again return into the body of the deceased. They also believed that the open mouth meant release of the soul and catching the last breath from the mouth of the dying person (Rode, 1991: 25). The scarf was always linen, which according to Greek belief was clean because it was not of animal origin (Чажкановић, 1924: 139-142). This custom of tying the mouth of the deceased with a scarf is also practiced today among Macedonian people in funeral customs. According to the Macedonian folk tradition, if the mouth is not tied or if the person appears to be smiling, it is a sign that there will be a death in the family. The kerchiefs and scarves by which the jaw, the hands and the legs of the deceased were tied were not to be untied during burial. Instead, they should be pulled and thrown into the grave. But, according to folk sayings, they usually remained in some of the domestic or neighborhoods’ women, who used them for doing magic. Nowadays the use of this kerchief is also frequent in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia for magic causes during court cases. During the trial some people find an opportunity to look at the judge or at the witnesses through the tied kerchief in belief that “they will tie” them and that they will not be able to speak, wishing that “the deceased is able to speak as long as this person is able to speak...” (Ристески, 1999: 66-67). In addition to the mouth, the legs were also tied. Here again the belief is to prevent the deceased from returning among the living. In relation to inserting the coin into the mouth of the deceased a

certain correspondence can be perceived between the Greek and the Macedonian folk tradition, but only in the ritual act and not in the motive. In certain rural areas the custom of inserting a silver coin can be perceived, which with great attention is sought for after digging the grave in four to five years in order to use it for healing from fear (Тановић, 1927: 253). The custom of tying the mouth with a kerchief has been transmitted from the late Mycenaean time through paganism and into Christianity. It is also practiced today in modern society throughout the whole territory of modern Greece and Macedonia. This custom from the past has not been altered up to the present day, as protective means not to let the jaw open.

After the deceased has been bathed and dressed in new clothes, the act of preparing the catafalque follows. In the Greek folk tradition the body of the deceased was displayed on a catafalque that was placed on the porch of the house, with the legs of the deceased turned towards the door (Фласелјер, 2002: 88). The catafalque represents a pedestal structured from a plank with high legs, a den in the form of a table, bed or *kline*. The catafalque was wrapped in a death cloth which was similar to a thick carpet. The wreath that decorated the head of the deceased was resting on a pillow (*proskephalaia*), and the body was draped with a death cover (*epiblemata*). The deceased was laid with the legs facing the left, probably towards the door (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 144). The scene of a deceased lain on a catafalque can be seen painted on many vases, or *lekythai*, a type of thin vase with a white bottom which were placed in front of the catafalque. On the vases a scene displaying the deceased on a catafalque placed outside of the house can be seen, around which women gathered with umbrellas and fans to protect the dead body from the sun and flies (Фласелјер, 2002: 88). In relation to this custom we get back to the custom in the Macedonian folk tradition of placing the deceased on the soil. This custom was performed until the 1930s, when they made the catafalque directly on the soil (Ковачева, 2009: 60-61). This custom was very old and widely practiced and symbolized that if the deceased is placed on "bare soil", he/she will obtain forgiveness from it and will be released from sins, and thus being able to die easier and the soul will easier leave in the soil. This custom is perceived throughout the Balkan region and is thought to originate from pagan times. It is older than Christianity, on the postulates of which the ascetic ideas for Christian learning in the Middle Ages have been built (Ђорђевић, 1938: 473-474). Today the catafalque is made on one of the tables in the house, on which first a reed is placed, then a carpet and in the end it is covered by a bed sheet (Тановић, 1927: 252). In the Macedonian folk tradition the deceased is placed on a catafalque with one's head facing west, the hands on the breasts in a form of cross, and in the hand a handkerchief and a candle are inserted. The candle must burn to its end. In the Macedonian folk tradition as elsewhere, a belief exists that fire and smoke have an apotropaic power and can exile the evil and dark forces. In Greece, the custom of fumigation at first represented a primitive form of disinfection, the aim of which was to remove the unpleasant smell, especially in summer (Burkert, 1979: 52-56). Even in modern day Macedonia it is customary to burn incense throughout the house. This is done right after the announcement of death (Тановић, 1927: 252). The Christian Church uses candles and incense in its rituals, symbolizing fire and fume. It has been supposed that the Christian Church has adopted and enhanced this custom (Barjaktarević, 1958: 8).

The custom of bathing the deceased with flowers has been perceived in the both traditions. In the Greek folk tradition putting a flower garland on the head of the deceased to look like a living crown of victory represents a match for the laurel garland by which the winners and the heroes used to be crowned. The golden garland was of special importance, which had been granted to the deceased by official institutions and in accordance with the achievements that the person had acquired in the course of his/her life. In some parts of the Republic of Macedonia, there is still the custom of crowning the head of the deceased with a flower garland if the deceased is a young boy or a bachelor. The act symbolizes the intention "to get

married in the other world". The white flowers that are put on the deceased body as part of the funeral customs are usually related to the young. If anyone brings flowers in another color, one of the women takes the flowers and puts them aside. In the Macedonian folk tradition a belief exists that in one's journey towards heaven, the deceased throws a flower to anyone who tries to fool him/her and turn him/her away from the path (Тановић, 1927: 253). As such, an important part of funeral customs represents putting flowers next to the dead body as a kind of guarantee that with the help of the flowers the deceased will not turn from the road to heaven. The flower is a symbol of nature and symbolizes the life force, happiness, the end of winter and the victory over Death. It is therefore interpreted as an emblem of circular movement: birth, life, death and rebirth. In modern folk traditions worldwide bringing flowers for the deceased and placing flower garlands near the graves remains an important element of funeral customs. It is experienced more like an act of piety than of any symbolic aspect.

After all the preparations around the deceased are ready the announcement of death follows. In the Greek folk tradition, the house in which the death took place was marked by a pot placed in front of the main door. The intention was to announce the death to some of the members of the family and as a kind of reminder of the dirt (*miasma*) that had touched the house. The pot contained water which had been brought from outside from the neighbors, because the water in the house was considered dirty. Those who were mourning were cleaned by the act of washing after leaving the house (Фласелјер, 2002: 89). It was also customary to hang a lock of hair or a twig from a cypress tree on the door to announce a death (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 146). In the Macedonian folk tradition, it is customary in rural areas for a housewife to go on the porch or in the yard and start crying and mourning. This way the neighbors understand that there has been a death of a family member (Ристески, 1999: 75). Death is also announced by the act of tolling the church bells, which toll once every 20 to 25 seconds to distinguish them from holidays (Тановић, 1927: 253). This practice is perceived throughout the territory of the Republic of Macedonia and in the Balkans more generally.

The act of keeping vigil over the deceased is known as *prothesis*, as initial procedure of the funeral rite. In Homer's period, the vigil could last several days. Later on, the body of the deceased was placed in the house and could be watched over for a day or two, finally to be restricted to one day. Plato recommended that watching over the deceased should last as long as was needed to establish the death (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 144), while Solon's law prescribed that the body of the deceased should be removed from the house the day after death. Only men were permitted to freely enter the house where the deceased was placed. Those who did enter were dressed in black or gray, or sometimes in white mourning clothes, with their hair cut as a sign of mourning. The men showed respect by touching him/her with their right hand, while the women who were allowed to enter mourned by singing ritual songs loudly (*ololigé*). This custom is also practiced in the Republic of Macedonia. The deceased is usually buried six to seven hours after death (Фласелјер, 2002: 88-89). If anyone dies within the period until midnight they usually bury the person the next day, and if the person dies after midnight or in the early hours, he/she is buried the same day. In the house, the deceased is placed on the catafalque and is not covered during the day, while in the night hours his/her face is covered with a sheet. During the night hours the deceased must be watched over. For example, there must be at least one person awake near the deathbed, in accordance with the folk beliefs that if everyone in the house is asleep and no one watches over the body, he/she might become a vampire and might escape. Watching or keeping vigil over the deceased is usually performed by the closest relatives, who sit and mourn in the same room, while the others stay in adjacent rooms. The people who come are dressed in black or dark-colored clothes, and in many rural areas of the Republic of Macedonia the women wear black scarves

on their heads. The women of the family do not wash their hair, but only comb it, while the men neither shave nor cut their hair within the following six weeks (Тановић, 1927: 253-255). Although the custom of watching or keeping vigil over the deceased has been altered, it is still practiced throughout territory of Greece and the Republic of Macedonia.

The lamenting song as result of momentary improvisation belongs to the oldest songs related to the funeral customs, by which it was wept and lamented over the deceased. Mourning, or terminologically marked as “lamenting”, is an expression of sadness through melodic contact with the deceased and the world of the deceased. Lamenting signifies the moment of separation of the deceased from the living members of the community and is interpreted as mediation process through which uninterrupted contact between the two worlds can be created (Ристески, 1999: 169-173). Through the lamenting songs a grieving for the deceased is expressed, the qualities of the deceased are praised, the cause and the mode of his/her death is described, among other things (Пенушлиски, 1968: 20-21). In the Greek folk tradition the lamenting songs were considered a very important part of funeral rituals. They were a kind of traditional mourning and a way of giving last tribute to the deceased. The very act of lamentation started with desperate crying and weeping by the women of the family, and was accompanied by pulling out their hair, thumping their chests and scratching their temples. While doing the lamentations the relatives were fainting from pain, they were also cutting their hair and throwing ashes over their heads, as well as rolling in the dust and wearing dirty clothes (Burkert, 1979: 192). From the home of the deceased the lamentations continued in procession that moved towards the grave, where they stopped at every corner of the path and they mourned with intention to attract attention. The lamentations could be solicited or bought by paying for professional mourners. In the pre-classical period all the lamentations were sung in a choir, while in the classical period the lamentations called *kommoi* were sung in order, first the singer and then the choir (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 144-147). Lamentations during funeral customs are evident in both Greece as well as in the folk tradition in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. According to the folk beliefs in territory of the Republic of Macedonia the lamentation mustn't be performed during the night hours, especially in “the dead of the night”, because “it could lure some demonic creatures that wander through the night”. It can be performed only after dawn. In this folk tradition the lamentations can be sung by women or men, although the women lament over the deceased longer than the men. The woman is obliged to mourn for the members of the family in which she was born and the family into which she entered through marriage. Men are not supposed to show their pain by weeping and moaning aloud (Вражиновски, Караџоски & Јовановска-Ризоска, 2006: 194-195). One or more women can lament, first the best one and then all the rest repeat the same verse. The lamenting takes place in the house, seated in front of the deceased and near the grave standing turned towards the deceased. When they lament at the commemoration, they mourn over the photograph of the deceased or some object that the deceased owned when alive, such as clothes or jewelry (Вукановић, 1935: 93-99). The expression of the unbearable pain of the housewives through weeping and moaning is almost the same in these two traditions. The only difference is in the bought or solicited lamentations in Greece, which is not evident in the folk tradition in territory of the Republic of Macedonia. In the period of Christianity the lamentations were replaced by silence, a custom that lasts to the present day.

Funeral invitations are customary in both traditions. In the Greek folk tradition when someone died all his/her relatives and friends were invited. Only the men and the women who were in blood kinship with the deceased as well as his/her best friends took part in the funeral procession. Because of the multitude of customs that followed during the funeral, the

expenses were huge. They included hiring mourners, contributions for the deceased, feasts in his/her honor, among other things. If the deceased did not have a family, or the family couldn't afford the funeral expenses, the responsibility was taken over by the closest friend. At the end of Solon's period, the legislators in the towns aimed their goals toward decreasing the number of people present at funerals, thus lowering the expenditure. The limit was aimed towards the number of the participants in the funeral procession, the type of sacrifices that had been submitted as well as the type of the tomb (Burkert, 1979: 194). The legislator's aim was to regulate the barbarian surges of pain and to restrict the luxury and squandering for funerals. They also found submitting sacrifices aimless. Therefore, the restriction of outsiders at funerals in the Greek tradition was for economic rather than religious reasons (Чайкановић, 1924: 143-144). Plato set five *minae* as the highest amount that was considered reasonable to spend for funerals. These expenses did not include furnishing the grave, thus many graves remained unfinished (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 143). In the folk tradition of the Republic of Macedonia, the relatives, neighbors and friends are invited. No one goes to funeral uninvited. The family and the closest relatives of the deceased have the right and duty to participate in the funeral, and all the others can participate only if invited. This standpoint is very old and draws its roots from the distant past of the Indo-European people, where the funeral represented a detail of the domestic cult that was restricted only to the family, with a character of family mystery, inaccessible for outsiders. It was believed that the deceased receives sacrifice only from the closest family, while the presence of outsiders would not be pleasant for the souls of the ancestors and would disturb their peace (Чайкановић, 1924: 145). In contemporary society the funeral is understood as a family matter

In the Greek and Macedonian folk traditions the grave is dug on the same day as the funeral. In the territory of Greece the graveyards were located outside the town fortifications. Two distinct types of burial were evident: skeletal burial (*inhumation*) and burning the body on a funeral pyre (*cremation*) (Burkert, 1979: 191). After the body had been burned on a funeral pyre, wine was used to extinguish the funeral fire. The relatives collected the ashes and stored them in urns, which they buried under ground. In the Greek folk tradition it was customary to measure the body with a red woolen thread. The measurements were then used to dig the grave. It was not customary to leave the grave empty during the night (Чайкановић, 1924: 141). In the Macedonian folk tradition, the custom of measuring the deceased is perceived when the master measured the deceased with a string and made the coffin by such a measure. He then gave the string to the gravediggers in order to dig the grave in accordance with the same measure. It was also customary to measure the body and the size of the grave by a twig or a straw. There exists a belief among people that if the twig by which the measuring of the deceased had been done was not thrown into the grave, it was possible to measure someone's shadow. The "measured" person could soon afterwards become ill and die. According to Macedonian folk beliefs, the grave should not be left overnight out of the fear that if it were jumped over by a cat or a dog the deceased could become a vampire. For that reason the grave is dug the same day when the funeral takes place. After being dug and up to the time when the coffin is placed into the hole, one person is made responsible to keep the grave to the final act. If in the family vault a body of another previously deceased person was placed, his/her bones are taken out, and then washed and wine is spilled over them. After the priest says the prayers the bones are again put back in one part of the grave (Тановић,

1927: 254). In contemporary society, both the traditions dig the grave on the day of the burial.

The funeral is considered as strictly family and private matter in both traditions. In the Greek folk tradition the funeral (*Ekhpora*) started with taking the body out of the home after the vigil period. In the pre-classical period taking the deceased out of the house took place on the third day (*ta trita*) before dawn (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 145), and in the classical period, in accordance with Solon's law (Антифон: *За копейтом*, 34), the body was taken out one day after being displayed, and also before dawn. The fear that was inherent in Greek folk beliefs that death could dirty the sun's rays relates to the religious aspect in selecting the time of burial (Фласелјер, 2002: 89). In the funeral procession the body was transported by a hearse that was drawn by a horse or on a stretcher. The hearse was carried by pallbearers, (*klimakphoroi* and *mekrophoroi*), buriers (*nekrothaptai*) and by the gravediggers (*tapheis*). At first the stretcher bearers were family members, but in the later period they were probably hired as well as the musicians (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 145) and the lamenting singers. The procession was headed by a woman who carried a sacrificial bowl with liquid in her hands. Men followed after her, and behind them were the women who were close relatives of the deceased (Фласелјер, 2002: 89) and the players of the *aulos*, which is a blowing instrument in form of pipe (Дуев, 2009: 66-67). After arriving at the place of burial the act of libation was performed as an act of ceremonial clearing with liquid (*choe*), symbolically meaning that the dead are *thirsty* (Burkert, 1979: 39-52). According to Greek folk beliefs, the one who prays could establish contact with the deceased through the act of libation the liquid penetrating into the ground. Since 800 B.C. and throughout the classical period it was usual to dig a furrow right next to the grave, through which libation was performed. Except libation, the food and vine as sacrificial gifts near the grave have been pointed out, but no more than three *kognii* of vine (3, 24 l), which was consumed by those present (Фласелјер, 2002: 89). At the end of the funeral customs sanctifying and burning of the food (*enagizein*) followed, as well as the act of sacrificing. A rare discovery shows the inserted pipes in the graves through which food was delivered with the aim of feeding the deceased (Burkert, 1979: 194). The pots found in some of the graves from the archaic and the classical period testify that they had been used only once, probably during *ta trita* (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 145). At the end of the funeral ceremonies, the participants in the procession said goodbye for the last time to the deceased and the women left the place first in order to go home and prepare the honorary feast that followed. The men remained in order to finish the activities around the grave, above which ordinary gravestones were placed. On their return to the house they observed the funeral custom of clearing by washing the body. This was done because of the belief that the dirt touched by death was the worst of all the types of dirt (Фласелјер, 2002: 89-90). The feast and the sacrifices for the deceased took place on the third day (*ta trita*), on the ninth day (*ta enata*) and on the thirtieth day of the funeral (*ta nomizomena*) (Kurtz & Bardman, 1971: 147), and ended on the first anniversary of the death (Фласелјер, 2002: 90). That was the period after which the family of the deceased continued with their ordinary life.

The tradition in the territory of Republic of Macedonia also contains a multitude of ritual acts in the course of funerals. The funeral act starts with taking the deceased out of the house and his/her journey to the graveyard. The deceased is taken out of the house legs first because of the belief that if the deceased is taken out headfirst he/she will reenter the house. Up until the 1930s, coffins were not used in the Republic of Macedonia for burying the deceased. Instead, the deceased was carried on a funeral “stretcher” made of two long rods with several branches placed transversally, or were intertwined by a rope or a net (Ристески, 1999: 76-82). If the stretcher could not pass through the door, the deceased was conveyed by being placed on a rag carpet and bed sheets, and outside they placed him/her again on the stretcher (Тановић, 1927: 255). Over time, stretchers were replaced by coffins made of wooden boards, and more recently by decorated and ornamented coffins. In the Macedonian folk tradition the body is always carried by hand in the procession, while they replace one another, as an act of repaying the deceased for something that they remained in debt to him/her. During the procession, the folk belief maintains that “the road to heaven is long” and the procession stands three times on their way towards the graveyard in order to rest. When they arrive at the grave, the priest says a short prayer and the deceased are placed inside the grave. All those who are present throw three handfuls of soil pronouncing the saying “*Rest in peace!*” (*May the soil be light for you*, literally), as an act of last parting and saying goodbye. The grave is covered by the same people who dug it, and the rest wash their hands at the local graveyard fountains as an act of clearing in accordance with the folk belief that the illness will remain in the grave (Тановић, 1927: 255-256). Giving food to the people in attendance is part of the funeral customs. Prior to eating, however, a holy sacrifice is left for the deceased, along with wine, which also through the act of libation is first spilled in his/her honor. In both the Greek and Macedonian traditions giving food and drink for the soul of the deceased is evident. According to the Macedonian folk tradition this should allow for successful crossing of the deceased to the “other” world (Ковачева, 1999: 122-123).

Summary

The traditional archetype of the Greek and the Macedonian folk traditions abounds in many customs around preparing the deceased. For example: keeping vigil over the body, taking it out of the house and carrying it to the grave in procession, digging the grave and the burial itself.

Posthumous customs in the Greek and the Macedonian folk traditions are due to death being understood as an act of passing from one existential level to another. Fear represents a major motive forming the posthumous customs. This is due to beliefs that the souls of the deceased ancestors can return to the world of the living and in their suffering and wandering between the worlds unless a proper funeral was arranged for them. The secret fear that they felt towards the deceased caused the appearance of many impressive methods of burial, the aim of which was protection of the community from the destructive factors and unfavorable influences.

Undoubtedly, the Greek and the Macedonian folk traditions have numerous funeral customs. To a certain extent they share ritual actions. Nevertheless, funeral customs in relation to certain characteristics of their own mark the given folk tradition and are interpreted as guardians of the people’s identity.

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