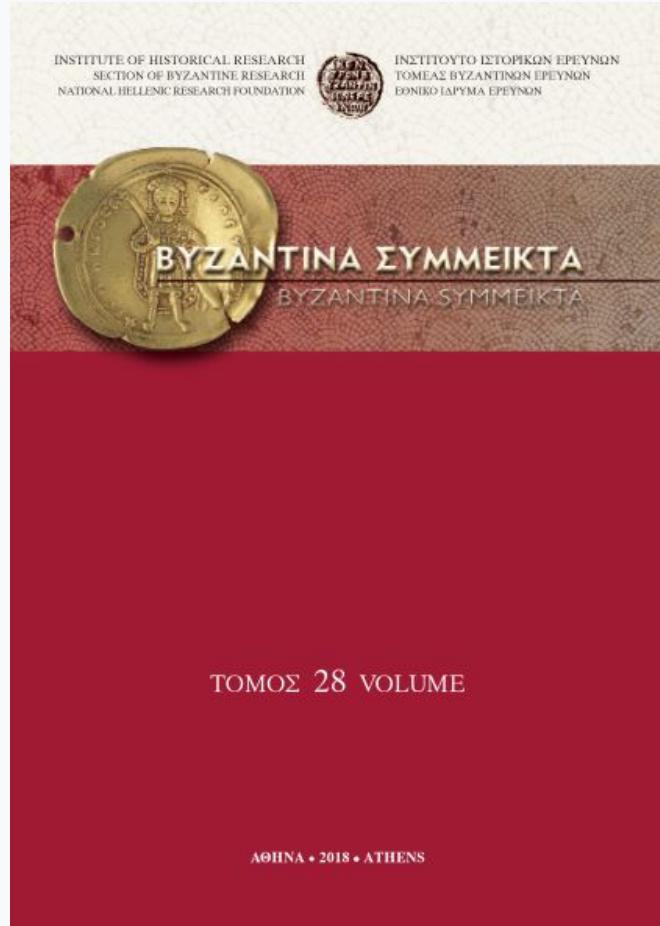


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### The ΠΑΡΑΝΥΜΦΟΣ in Ancient Greece and Byzantium: A Study on the Role and Prosopography

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ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
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# ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΑ ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ

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## BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA

ΤΟΜΟΣ 28 VOLUME

SAMEH FAROUK SOLIMAN

THE ΠΑΡΑΝΥΜΦΟΣ IN ANCIENT GREECE AND BYZANTIUM:  
A STUDY ON THE ROLE AND PROSOPOGRAPHY

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THE *ΠΑΡΑΝΥΜΦΟΣ* IN ANCIENT GREECE AND BYZANTIUM:  
A STUDY ON THE ROLE AND PROSOPOGRAPHY

Neither the most recent edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*<sup>1</sup> nor the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*<sup>2</sup> have an entry on the “*paranymph*”! One might conclude from this conspicuous omission in these standard reference works on the field of Classical and Byzantine Studies, that they consider the “*paranymph*” a figure of little importance for the society of ancient Greece and Byzantium. Such an impression, that the “*paranymph*” had little impact on these two above-mentioned societies, is highly misleading, and should be remediated in future revisions of these valuable resources, since the existence of the *paranymphs* was one of the important characteristics of the society of ancient Greece and Byzantium.

The simple definition of the *παράνυμφος*<sup>3</sup>, as an ancient Greek compound word from “*παρά+νύμφη*” (male & female), is the “friend of the bridegroom”, “the bridegroom’s best man” and a “bridesmaid” or “maid of honor”, literary: “person beside or near the bride”.

Making use of the extensive material of ancient Greece and Byzantium as well, such as the literary texts, the historical evidence and the lexical

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1. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. by S. HORNBLAER and A. SPAWFORTH, 4th ed., Oxford University Press 2012.

2. *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. by A. KAZHDAN et alii, Oxford University Press 1991, 3 vols., [hereafter: *ODB*].

3. The *Greek - English Lexicon* compiled by H. G. LIDDELL and R. SCOTT, Oxford 1996 [hereafter: *LSJ*] in its *Supplement* (p. 240) adds also *παρανύμφη* as the woman who conducts a bride.

entries, I would like to present a comprehensive survey of the prosopography and the various roles played by the *paranymph*. It is obvious that the function of the *paranymph* witnessed some alterations and developments not only from time to time, but also from a stage of the wedding to another. So the purpose of the present article is to gather and evaluate the available evidence pertaining to the *paranymph* in an effort to draw a prosopography of this functionary, define the role he played and focus on the developments of this role through the ages, specifically during the ancient Greece and Byzantium.

In ancient Greek weddings, the *paranymph* was the best friend of the bridegroom, who assisted him at a wedding and accompanied him in a chariot when he went to bring home the bride, or the bridesmaid who typically was a young woman, and often a close friend or sister escorted the bride to the bridegroom. The term means also the person who speaks for another; an advocate<sup>4</sup>.

In Byzantium, the role of the *paranymph* did not change much, since the bride and the bridegroom were also attended by a *paranymph*, who was the friend of the bridegroom or the bridesmaid, an unmarried person or usually young girl of high classes, who accompanies the bride or the bridegroom in the church and stands near them during the wedding ceremony and changes the bridal crowns.

Searching through the ancient Greek literature and the Byzantine as well, we find that the *paranymph* was known by many names, according to his role in the wedding ceremony; among them we note (in alphabetical order): *θαλαμηπόλος* (*εύνοιχος*), *θυρωρός*, *νυμφαγωγός*, *νυμφευτήρ*, *νυμφευτής*, *νυμφοστόλος*, *παραβάτης*, *παράνυμφος* (*κυριώτερον δὲ παρανύμφιος*)<sup>5</sup>, *παράπομπος*, *πάροχος* or *παροχούμενος* (bridegroom's attendant), *προηγητής*, *προηγητήρ*, *συνακόλουθος*, *συναπάγων*.

As for the *paranymph* (the female) she was called (also in alphabetical order): *θαλαμηπόλος*, *νυμφεύτρια*, *νυμφοκόμος*, *νυμφοπόνος* and *ὑπονυμφίς*. All denote *paranymph*, or the best man or a person having

4. V. T. CHENEY, *A Brief History of Castration*, 2nd ed., Bloomington, Indiana 2006, 236 and J. REILLY, "Mistress and Maid" on Athenian Lekythoi, *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 58, No. 4 (1989), 411-444.

5. *Nomina aetatum* (fragmentum Parisinum), ed. A. NAUCK, *Aristophanis Byzantii Grammatici Alexandrini Fragmenta*, 2nd ed., Halle 1848, p. 80, sec. 13,<sup>1-2</sup>.

somehow something to do with marital relationships, and, more specifically, with weddings<sup>6</sup>.

### 1. In Ancient Greece

In ancient Greek wedding, we meet the *paranymph* (the female) for the first time in the house of the bride's father where she minds to adorn the bride. In his *Lexicon*, the Alexandrian lexicographer Hesychius (5/6th cent. A. D.) lists and defines several terms for bride's attendants and assistants as: *νυμφοκόμος* which means: *ἡ κοσμοῦσα τὴν νύμφην*<sup>7</sup>, as the bridesmaid adorning the bride; *νυμφοπόνος* which means: *ἡ περὶ τὴν νύμφην πονονυμένη*<sup>8</sup>, as the one dressing the bride. These "bridesmaids" were responsible for assistance, embellishment and bride's adornment. The terms are given in the singular and do not specify whether one special *paranymph* was appointed, or if several women could hold this title; further, it is not known if each one of the bride's assistants had a specific title and function<sup>9</sup>. It is appropriate that Greek wedding preparation scenes on vases depicting the bride readying herself should also include a number of women who prepared her and probably gave her emotional support; see, e.g., the so-called *Kerch lekanis*, now at the Hermitage Museum (Fig. 1).

6. M. MALUL, Susapinnu: The Mesopotamian Paranymp and his Role, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 32/3 (1989), 241-278. The *paranymph* is found in the ancient Greek mythology in *Scholia in Aves* (v. 1737) about Ἔρως who is said to have acted as *paranymph* of Zeus and Hera: ὁ Ἔρως, φησί, παράνυμφος ἦν τοῦ Διὸς καὶ τῆς Ἡρᾶς. v. *Scholia in Aves (scholia vetera)*, ed. F. DÜBNER, *Scholia Graeca in Aristophanem*, Paris 1877, 247. In Admetus' wedding we find Herakles to come to initiate the wedding. Here Herakles as *paranymph* presents the veiled "bride" and unveils her; then Admetus leads her by hand into the house, R. C. KETTERER, Machines of the Suppression of Time: Statues in "Suor Angelica", "The Winter's Tale" and "Alcestis", *Comparative Drama* 24 (1990), 3-23. And in Greek Tragedy, e. g. in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Clytemnestra presents herself as Iphigenia's *νυμφαγωγός*, since she has led her daughter from Argos to Aulis, R. MITCHELL-BOYASK, The Marriage of Cassandra and the "Oresteia": Text, Image, Performance, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 136/2 (1974), 269-297 and R. GRAVES, *The Greek Myths*, Penguin Books 1026, 1955, 212.

7. *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. K. LATTE, v. 2, Copenhagen 1966, 719.

8. *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, v. 2, 719.

9. O. E. TZACHOU-ALEXANDRI, A Kalpis from Piraeus Street by Polygnotos, *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 97 (2002), 297-308.

When the *paranymph* fulfills her duty as the bride's assistant in the house of the bride's father, another role begins for her as to escort the bride as a *νυμφεύτρια*; she is chosen by the bride's family and sent to escort her by the parents of the bride: *συμπειπομένη ὑπὸ τῶν γονέων τῇ νύμφῃ*<sup>10</sup>, along the road from her father's house to the bridegroom's house. In the ancient Greek weddings, the bride's safety was the particular duty of a friend of the bridegroom appointed as the *πάροχος*, i. e. *the man beside in the cart or supporter*. According to Julius Pollux the Grammarian, it was *paranymph*'s first job to ride along with the bride, so that she was safely seated between him and the bridegroom: *κάθηται ἡ νύμφη μεταξὺ τοῦ παρόχου τε καὶ τοῦ νυμφίου*<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 4). The bridegroom brings his bride from her parents' house on a car (δρυμα) drawn by horses, mules, or oxen; on either side of her sat the bridegroom and his best man (*παράνυμφος* or *πάροχος*)<sup>12</sup>: *Καλεῖται γὰρ πάροχος τῶν φίλων τις ὁ ἐπὶ τῷ ὀχήματι ἄμα τῇ νύμφῃ καὶ τῷ νυμφίῳ ὁχούμενος, οἷον παράνυμφος*<sup>13</sup> (*For supporter is called the one of the friends who sits on a chariot together with the bride and the bridegroom, i. e. the *paranymph**) and *Πάροχοι λέγονται καὶ οἱ παράνυμφοι παρὰ τὸ παροχεῖσθαι τοῖς νυμφίοις: ἐπὶ ὀχήματος γὰρ τὰς νύμφας ἦγον*<sup>14</sup> (*Supporters are said to be the *paranymphs* from supporting the bridegrooms, for on a chariot they were leading the brides*). Late in the evening of the wedding day there followed *ποιπή*, when the bride was led on a chariot by the bridegroom and a friend in solemn procession to the house of the bridegroom's father<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 3).

10. *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, v. 2, 719. Cfr. *Sudae Lexicon*, ed. A. ADLER, *Suidae Lexicon*, 4 vols [Lexicographi Graeci 1.1-1.4], v. 3, Leipzig 1935, 61-62. *Photii patriarchae Lexicon*, ed. Chr. THEODORIDIS, v. 2, Berlin - New York 1998, 282,4.

11. Julius Pollux, *Onomasticon*, ed. E. BETHE, *Pollucis Onomasticon*, 2 vols. [Lexicographi Graeci 9.1-9.2, Leipzig 1900-1931] 10. 33. J. H. OAKLEY - R. H. SINOS, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, University of Wisconsin Press 1993, 27. Translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

12. Aristophanis, *Aves*, 1735.

13. *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, v. 2, 719.

14. *Sudae Lexicon*, [as in n. 10], 61-62.

15. M. BIEBER, *Eros and Dionysos on Kerch Vases*, *Hesperia Supplements* 8 [Commemorative Studies in honour of Theodore Leslie Shear (1949)], 31-38.

We don't know from the contexts above if there were two female *paranymphs* for these two roles or one; one in the house of the bride's father for the adornment of the bride and the other for accompanying the bride along the road to the bridegroom's house? Independently of the interpretations that have at times been given for these particular persons and their number, and in the context of other literary texts, the fact remains that a number of related individuals assisted the bride in adorning herself and they are always depicted in scenes of wedding preparations<sup>16</sup>.

The Athenians used to call the person who is going to fetch the bride from her paternal house to the house of the bridegroom according to his function; the *paranymph* is called: *παροχούμενος* or *πάροχος*<sup>17</sup> (*παραβάτης* and *παράπομπος*)<sup>18</sup> if he fetches the bride from her paternal house to her bridegroom's house using a chariot, *συνακόλουθος* if he follows and accompanies the bridegroom in fetching the bride, *νυμφαγωγός* if he fetches the bride from her paternal house to her bridegroom's house on foot (*χαμαίποντος*)<sup>19</sup>:

The bridegroom did not always follow the wedding procession; Hesychius in his *Lexicon* informs us that in case that the bridegroom is being married for the second time, he did not bring the bride himself home in this exultant way: *ῳ πρότερον γεγαμηκότι οὐκ ἔξεστι μετελθεῖν διὸ ἀποστέλλοντο τῶν φίλων τινάς*<sup>20</sup>, but sends a friend as *νυμφαγωγός*, i. e. ὁ νύμφην ἄγων ἐκ

16. I. S. MARK, The Gods on the east Frieze of the Parthenon, *Hesperia* 53 (1984), 289-342.

17. *Sudae Lexicon* [as in n.10], *Πάροχοι* γὰρ λέγονται οἱ παράνυμφοι, (*παρὰ τὸ παροχεῖσθαι τοῖς νυμφίοις*. ἐπ' ὀχήματος γὰρ τὰς νύμφας ἄγοντιν, repeated in DÜBNER, *Scholia Graeca* [as in n. 6], 247 and in *Commentarium in Aves* (scholia vetera et recentiora Tzetzae), ed. W. J. W. KOSTER, *Jo. Tzetzae Commentarii in Aristophanem* [Scholia in Aristophanem 4.3], Groningen 1962, v. 1737.

18. *Πάροχοι παραβάται. παράπομποι, καὶ οἱ συμπορεύοντες τῇ νύμφῃ ἐπὶ τοῦ ξεύγους, καὶ (οἱ) παράνυμφοι* (*Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, v. 3, ed. P. A. HANSEN, Berlin -New York 2005, 48).

19. *Aristophanis Byzantii Fragmenta* [as in n. 5], Frag. 11. 1, 146-148; *Pollucis Onomasticon* [as in n. 11], Book 3, sect. 40. *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem*, ed. M. van der VALK, *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem Pertinentes* (vols. 1-4, Leiden 1971-1987), v. 2, 351.

20. *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, v. 2, 718-719 (*For he who formerly had been married it is not lawful to go with, for that they send some friends*).

*τοῦ πατρὸς οἰκίας*<sup>21</sup> in that case brings the bride to him from her house. The procession approaches the bridegroom's house to which the *προηγητὴς* or *προηγητής*, or usher, leads. Aelius Dionysius Halicarnassaeus (2th cent. A. D.) states that: *προηγητής. ὁ τοῦ ζεύγους ἡγούμενος ἐν τοῖς γάμοις*<sup>22</sup> (*The usher is the one who leads the couple in weddings*).

The *paranymph* (here *πάροχος*) had another job to do in the chariot processions; he was holding a torch (as a torch-bearer), following closely behind the new married couple<sup>23</sup>. In front of the car went the torch-bearing procession (*δᾶδες νυμφικαῖ*)<sup>24</sup>, the nuptial torch having been lit by the mother of the bride or of the bridegroom. The bride's mother holds torches and walks alongside the chariot in which the couple travels (the bridegroom just ascending) followed by the *πάροχος*<sup>25</sup> who also holds this torch and comes finally after the bridegroom and the *νυμφεύτρια*<sup>26</sup> and is followed by several women carrying containers, which probably held the bride's trousseau<sup>27</sup>.

This particular job of the *paranymph* as a torch – bearer is found in many texts see, e.g., the description of the famous picture of the painter Aetion, which Lucian the Samosatensis (2th cent. A. D.) says, about *Nuptials of Roxana and Alexander*, that it was in Italy and the painter depicts a fair chamber, with the bridal bed in it; Roxana seated –and a great beauty she is– with downcast eyes, troubled by the presence of Alexander, who is standing. Several smiling Loves; one stands behind Roxana, pulling away the veil on her head to show her to Alexander; another obsequiously draws off her sandal, suggesting bed-time; a third has hold of Alexander's mantle, and

21. *The one who leads the bride from her father's house* (*Hesychii Alexandrinii Lexicon*, v. 2, 718-719).

22. *Ἄττικὰ Ὄνόματα*, ed. H. ERBSE, *Untersuchungen zu den attizistischen Lexika* [Abhandlungen der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Philosoph.-hist. Kl., Berlin 1950], 60, 1, see also *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam*, ed. G. STALLBAUM, 2 vols. in 1. Leipzig 1825-1826, v. 1, p. 32, 11-12.

23. OAKLEY-SINOS, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 31.

24. *Pollucis onomasticon*, ed. BETHE, 3, 43, 3.

25. OAKLEY-SINOS, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 33.

26. OAKLEY-SINOS, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 33.

27. A. C. SMITH, *The Politics of Weddings at Athens: An Iconographic Assessment*, *Leeds International Classical Studies* 4/1 (2005), 1-32.

is dragging him with all his might towards Roxana. The King is offering her a garland, and by him as supporter (*πάροχος*) and bridegroom's-man (*νυμφαγωγός*) is Hephaestion, *holding a lighted torch* and leaning on a very lovely boy<sup>28</sup> (see Fig. 2, a 16th-century fresco by Giovanni Antonio Bazzi).

Another role of the *paranymph*, either male or female, begins in the bridegroom's new house where the bride was led around the altar, and then by the bridesmaid, the *νυμφεύτρια*, to the marriage chamber<sup>29</sup>. The appointed official functioned as a guardian on the wedding night to protect the couple from eventual dangers, i.e. kidnaping the bride, or otherwise disrupt the consummation of the marriage. In the wedding described in Xenophon of Ephesus, the bride's friends and relatives lead her to the bridal chamber to meet the bridegroom there<sup>30</sup>.

After the bride and bridegroom had entered the bridal chamber, a friend of the bridegroom or/and the bridesmaid serve as *θυρωρός*, i. e. waiting in the bridegroom's house, closing the door of the bridal chamber and guarding it<sup>31</sup> during the wedding night. This is implied in Pollux's explanation of the *θυρωρός* job – to “*prevent the women from helping the screaming bride*”<sup>32</sup>: *καλεῖται δέ τις τῶν τοῦ νυμφίου φίλων καὶ θυρωρός, δις ταῖς θύραις ἐφεστηκὼς εἴργει τὰς γυναικας τῇ νύμφῃ βοώσῃ βοηθεῖν*<sup>33</sup>. According to Sappho, the *paranymph* was standing on the door of the nuptial chamber only to keep it closed and so as to guard the new married couple. So, Sappho, in one of her poems, calls the *paranymph* *θυρωρός*, since he minds to keep the door of the nuptial chamber closed: *ὁ παράνυμφος, ὁ τὴν θύραν τοῦ θαλάμου κλείων*<sup>34</sup>, and guards the bedroom door, or he may act as the

28. Lucian, *Ηρόδοτος ἡ Ἀετίων*, in *Luciani Opera*, ed. M. D. MACLEOD, v. 3, Oxford 1980, 348: *πάροχος δὲ καὶ νυμφαγωγὸς Ἡφαιστίων συμπάρεστι, δῆδα καιομένην ἔχων, μειρακίῳ πάννῳ ὠραίῳ ἐπερειδόμενος* [transl. according to H. W. and F. G. FOWLER, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, v. 2 (Oxford 1905), 92]. For more details about Aetion's picture see P. LINANT DE BELLEFONDS, Hyménaios: une iconographie contestée, *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome / Antiquité* 103, N°1 (1991), 197-212.

29. BIEBER, Eros and Dionysos on Kerch Vases [as in n. 15].

30. Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesiaca*, ed. G. DALMEYDA, *Xenophon d'Ephese, Les Ephesiaca ou le Roman d'Habrocome et d'Anthia*. Paris 1926, I. 1. 8, p.11.

31. OAKLEY-SINOS, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 37.

32. OAKLEY-SINOS, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 37.

33. *Pollucis Onomasticon* 3, 42.

34. *Hesychii Lexicon*, v. 2, 338, with reference to Sapphos' fragment 110 LOBEL-PAGE.

bridegroom's father<sup>35</sup>. So one of the *paranymph*'s name in ancient Greece was θαλαμηπόλος (chambellan); according to Pseudo-Zonaras θαλαμηπόλος means ὁ περὶ τὸν θάλαμον ἀναστρεφόμενος<sup>36</sup> and according to Photius' *Lexicon* and *Suda*<sup>37</sup> it means ἡ περὶ τὸν θάλαμον ἀναστρεφομένη καὶ φυλάττουσα<sup>38</sup> (i. e. attendant in a lady's chamber, waiting -maid = “ὁ or ἡ, a bridegroom or bridesmaid)<sup>39</sup> and in later Greek it meant eunuch of the bedchamber<sup>40</sup>. Admittedly, the lexical and textual evidence is not clear whether the *paranymph* was admitted into the nuptial chamber.

The *paranymph*, after marriage, was considered the patron and advocate who solicits or speaks for the bridegroom and in some sort his guardian and had the right to intervene for his sake, that is, an advocate, but that sense is now very rare. In Aristophanes' *Acharnians* we meet the *paranymph* (here a bridesmaid) as one of the *dramatis personae*, who came to Dicaeopolis saying that a young bridegroom sends him viands from the marriage feast and prays him to pour a glass of peace into this vase, that he may not have to go to the front (of the army) and may stay at home to do his duty to his young wife. The dialogue runs as follows:

- ΠΑ.: Ἐπεμψέ τίς σοι νυμφίος ταντὶ κρέα  
ἐκ τῶν γάμων. - ΔΙ.: Καλῶς γε ποιῶν ὅστις ἦν.  
- ΠΑ.: Ἐκέλευε δ' ἐγχέαι σε τῶν κρεῶν χάριν,  
ἵνα μὴ στρατεύοιτ' ἀλλὰ βινοίη μένων,  
έξ τὸν ἀλάβαστον κύαθον εἰρήνης ἔνα<sup>41</sup>.

35. OAKLEY-SINOS, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 36.

36. *Iohannis Zonarae Lexicon ex tribus codicibus manuscriptis*, ed. J. A. H. TITTMANN, 2 vols. Leipzig, 1808, v. 1. 1020, 13. See also ἡ περὶ τὸν κοιτῶνα ἡ περὶ τὸν θάλαμον διατρίβουσα ἡ ἀναστρέφουσα. *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, v. 2, 303.

37. *Suidae Lexicon* [as in n. 10], v. 2, 1931, 680.

38. *Photii patriarchae Lexicon* [as in n. 10], 282,4.

39. *LSJ*, 311.

40. Plutarch, *Alexander*, 30: Τῶν δὲ θαλαμηπόλων τις εὐνοῦχος....

41. Aristophanis, *Acharnians*, 1049-1053 (translated after Aristophanes, *The Eleven comedies*, v. 1, London 1912, 147):

Wedding Guest: A young bridegroom sends you these viands from the marriage feast.

Dicaeopolis: Whoever he be, I thank him.

Wedding Guest: And in return, he prays you to pour a glass of peace into this vase, that he may not have to go to the front and may stay at home to do his duty to his young wife.

At last Dicaeopolis did not refuse the proposal since the bride, as a woman, is not responsible for the war<sup>42</sup>.

## 2. In Byzantium

The role of the *paranymph* in Byzantium was somehow similar to that in the ancient Greek tradition. The *paranymphs* were never absent from the marriages of kings, nobles, dignitaries, princes and persons of distinction. In Byzantium, the *paranymph*'s functions in the wedding ceremony was to exchange the rings and/or the crowns. Some of these figures as “the best man” of the bridegroom or the “maid” of the bride were of high social ranks; others were Patrician prominent figures in the society such as magistrates, noble men and eunuchs or upper class women.

Most of the Byzantine texts don't refer to the ordinary role of the *paranymph* in simple and humble weddings but rather focus on the *paranymph* on the environment of the Imperial Court. So we will throw light on the role and prosopography of the *paranymph* in the weddings of the high classes of Byzantium.

The existence of the *paranymph* in the weddings of the emperors and empresses was so essential that the choice by the emperor of a *paranymph* seems to have been a very important matter in the Imperial Court. The emperor's bridal attendant ought to be an imperial *distinguished man* (*ἀνὴρ περιβλεπτος*)<sup>43</sup> in the royal household. In the *Chronicon Paschale* we find that Paulinus, who was magistrate and a boyhood friend of Theodosius II, acted as a *paranymph* at the Emperor's wedding and a mediator in his marriage: Ό δὲ βασιλεὺς Θεοδόσιος Παυλίνον ὡς φίλον αὐτοῦ καὶ μεσάσαντα τῷ γάμῳ καὶ συναριστοῦντα αὐτοῖς ἐποίησεν διὰ πάσης ἀξίας ἐλθεῖν καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα προηγάγετο αὐτὸν μάγιστρον.

42. Ν. ΚΥΡΙΑΚΙΑΟΥ, *Η ειρηνική τριάδα του Αριστοφάνη: Αχαρνείς, Ειρήνη, Λυσιστράτη*, Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης 2010, 33.

43. As in the case of the wedding of Tiberius' daughter, see *Παρόην δ' ὁ τοῦ βασιλέως νυμφευτής εύνοοῦχος δ' ἄρα ἵν οὗτος τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος... ἀνὴρ περιβλεπτος...*: Theophylact Simocatta, ed. C. de BOOR, Leipzig 1887 [repr. Stuttgart 1972], p. 58, 1. 10. 6-9, trans. M. WHITBY and M. WHITBY, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, Oxford 1986, 33-34 (cf. n. 54 and 58 below]. T. E. GREGORY, *A History of Byzantium*, London 2010, 164. In general R. GUILLAND, *Les eunuques dans l'empire byzantin: Étude de titulature et de prosopographie byzantines*, *Études Byzantines* I (1943), 197-238.

καὶ ηὐξήθη, ὡς ἔχων παθόησίαν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα Θεοδόσιον καὶ τὴν Αὔγουσταν, ὡς καὶ παράνυμφος αὐτῶν γενόμενος<sup>44</sup> (*But the king Theodosius made Paulinus as his friend and a mediator in his marriage, and to eat with them, and to come to every honor. And after that he (Theodosius) appointed him magistrate and he is augmented, as having openness before the king Theodosius and the Augusta, since he became also their paranymph*). Georgius Monachus (842-867 A. D.) refers that this Paulinus received a greater honor from the emperor Theodosius II when the later appointed him as his *paranymph* saying: συνευδοκοῦντος καὶ τοῦ προσφιλεστάτου καὶ συνανατρόφου αὐτοῦ Παυλίνου, δις καὶ γενόμενος μάγιστρος ἐτιμήθη μειζόνως ὡς συνεργὸς καὶ παράνυμφος<sup>45</sup> (*Paulinus, The most beloved, who was consent and brought together with him, and who became a magistrate, was also honored more by being a co-worker (partner) and a paranymph*).

The position of the *paranymph* seems to have been so crucial in the Byzantine Court that the Emperor Constantinus VII Porphyrogenitus (reigned 913-959) states in his *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae* that only the king had the privilege to choose and appoint from the patrician women individuals to the position of the bridesmaids (*paranymphs*) whomever he wants, in order that they may enter into the chamber of the Augusta through the Octagons and give her the crown. By the same way in the crowning, the king appoints the *paranymph* and the patricians whomever he wants: Χρὴ δὲ γυνώσκειν <ὅτι> ὁρίζει ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐκ τὰς πατρικίας, οἵας θέλει, ἵνα εἰσέλθωσιν εἰς τὸν Αὔγουστέα διὰ τοῦ Ὁκταγώνου, καὶ ἵδωσι <τὸ> στέψιμον τῆς Αὔγούστης. Ὄμοιώς καὶ εἰς τὸ στεφάνωμα ὁρίζει ὁ βασιλεὺς, ἵνα εἰσέλθῃ ὁ παράνυμφος, καὶ πατρικίους, οὓς κελεύει, καὶ ὅτε πληρωθῇ τὸ στεφάνωμα, ἐξέρχονται οἱ αὐτοὶ πατρίκιοι καὶ ἵστανται εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῶν μετὰ καὶ τὸν λοιπὸν πατρικίους<sup>46</sup> (*It should*

44. *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. DINDORF, v. 1 [CSHB], Bonn 1832, 579. 10 and *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, ed. I. I. THURN [CFHB 35], Berlin – New York 1980, 275.

45. *Georgii Monachi Chronicon* (lib. 1-4), ed. C. de BOOR, 2 vols. Leipzig: Teubner 1904, 609, <sup>2-5</sup>.

46. *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris de Ceremoniis Aulae byzantinae* [CSHB], v. 1, Bonn 1829, 126 = PG 112, 468. *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae* (lib. 1.1-92), ed. A. VOGT, *Le livre des cérémonies*, v. 2, Paris 1939, 21 [transl. by A. MOFFATT and M. TALL, *Constantine Porphyrogenetos*, The Book of Ceremonies, v.1, Canberra 2012, 214].

be recognized that the emperor decides which of the patrician women he wishes to go into the Hall of the Augsteus via the Octagon and see the coronation of the Augousta. Likewise, too, for the nuptial crowning, the emperor decides that the groomsman goes in and which of the patricians he is inviting, and when the nuptial crowning has been completed, the said patricians go out and stand in their places along with the rest patricians. In the *Chronicon Maius* of Pseudo-Sphrantzes (15th cent. A. D.), we find that Helen, daughter of Alexius Paleologus Tzamblakon, a family of military commanders, landowners and countries known from the mid of the 13th cent. A. D.<sup>47</sup>, to say that her *paranymph* was her master (*αὐθέντης*), sir (*δεσπότης*) and lord (*κύρος*) Constantinus who, according to the Byzantine customs and traditions, crowned them both, the bride and the bridegroom: *Τῷ δὲ με-ῷ ἔτει, τῇ κα-ῃ Ἰαννουαρίου μηνός, εὐλογήθην ἐγὼ Ἐλένην τὴν θυγάτερα τοῦ ἐπὶ κανικλείου Ἀλεξίου Παλαιολόγου τοῦ Τζαμπλάκωνος· καὶ ἦν ἐν τῷδε τῷ συνοικείῳ παράνυμφος ὁ αὐθέντης μου ὁ δεσπότης κύρος Κωνσταντῖνος, ὁ κατὰ τὸ ἥμέτερον ἔθος στεφανώσας ἥμας*<sup>48</sup> (In the 46th year, on 26th of the month January, I, Helene the daughter of Alexius Paleologus Tzamblakon, was blessed. In this wedding the *paranymph* was my master, sir and lord Constantinus, who, according to our tradition, crowned us).

From the available texts, it seems that the eunuch<sup>49</sup> was the right person to whom the bridegroom would entrust to act as a *paranymph*; so under the Emperor Maurice (582-602 A. D.), Margarites, the great eunuch, was one of the most honored personages in the Imperial Court so he had the honour to serve as a *paranymph* at the wedding of Maurice and Tiberius

47. ODB, v. 3, 2135.

48. *Pseudo-Phrantzes Cronica*, ed. V. GRECU, *Georgios Sphrantzes. Memorii 1401-1477 [Scriptores Byzantini 5]*, Bucuresti 1966, 332. 6 and R. GUILLAND, Le protovestiarite Georges Phrantzès, *RÉB* 6 (1948), 48-57.

49. In her book about the *Perfect Servant* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003) Kathryn M. RINGROSE did not mention anything about the *eunuch* as a *paranymph* though her book was about the *Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium*. CH. MESSIS, *Les eunuques à Byzance entre réalité et imaginaire* [Dossiers Byzantins 14], Paris 2014, 249, simply states that “plus autres eunuques ayant joué un certain rôle dans l’entourage des empereurs ou des impératrices”.

II's daughter, Constantina, in 582 A. D.<sup>50</sup>. Theophanes, the eunuch<sup>51</sup>, was invited to the marriage of Maria Lecapena, the young daughter of Romanus I, with Peter, king of the Bulgarians, in 927 A. D., acting as *paranymph* at the nuptial ceremony<sup>52</sup>. Theophanes is said to have arranged all matters relating to the marriage of Maria and acted as a *paranymph* in the wedding ceremony<sup>53</sup>. According to Theophanes the Chronographer, *paranymphs* were relatives or / and friends of the bridegroom and sometimes figures of the Byzantine Court and specially the eunuchs: he says: *Τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει ἐβασίλευσε Μαρούκιος ἐτῶν ὑπάρχων μγ', καὶ μετ' ὀλίγον τὸν γάμον πεποίηκεν, Παύλου τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ ἐλθόντος εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον, καὶ παρενύμφευσε Μαρίτης* [evidently Margarites] *ὁ εὐνοῦχος τοῦ παλατίου μέγας ὑπάρχων*<sup>54</sup> (*In this year Maurice became the king when he was 43 years old, and after a short time he made a wedding, when his father came to Byzantium, and the paranymph (παρενύμφευσε) was Maritis, the eunuch, who was great in the palace*). During the ceremony of the holy mystery of the wedding, the *paranymphs* were to keep the crowns during the bridal procession inside the church<sup>55</sup> with parents of the new married couple, all the senate and the patricians<sup>56</sup> and were accompanying the new married

50. CHENEY, *A Brief History of Castration*, 95. See also S. TOUGHER, *The Eunuch in the Byzantine History and Society*, Routledge 2008, 156 simply including Margarites in the “Select Prosopographs of late Roman and Byzantine eunuchs”. In this book, S. Tougher did not mention the *paranymph* among the various functions of the *eunuch* in spite of his book title.

51. R. GUILLAND, Fonctions et dignités des eunuques, *Études Byzantines* 2 (1944), 185-225, here 207. GUILLAND, Les eunuques, 208, 223.

52. *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. THURN [CFHB 5], Berlin-N. York 1973, 223, *παρανυμφεύσοντων τοῦ πρωτοβεστιαρίου καὶ τοῦ Σουρσουβούλη*, cfr. *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, ed. S. WAHLGREN [CFHB 44], 328; and *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. BEKKER [CSHB], Bonnae 1838, 413 sq, 442, 746, 748, Constantine VII, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. G. MORAVCSIK – R. JENKINS, Washington 1968, 13, 161-164; CHENEY, *A Brief History of Castration*, 97.

53. See n. 51 supra.

54. *Theophanes Chronographia*, 252, 26. Cedrenus [CSHB], Bonn 1838, I, 691. Theophylact Simocatta (DE BOOR) 57-58. Cfr. Ph. KOUKOULES, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμός*, Athens 1951, v. 4, 139.

55. KOUKOULES, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμός*, v. 4, 107.

56. KOUKOULES, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμός*, v. 4, 139.

couple while getting out of the church<sup>57</sup>. Theophylact Simocatta says about the wedding of Maurice and Constantina that in full view of the people the bride's attendant (*νυμφαγωγός*) saluted the bridal pair with a cup, for it was not right to put on crowns, since they were not in fact private individuals who were being married (*οὐ θέμις γὰρ ἦν ἐπιθέσθαι στεφάνους, οὐ γὰρ ἴδιωται ἐτύγχανον ὄντες*). For this action had already been anticipated by their royal title, since the bride and bridegroom had already been crowned as emperor and empress and they did not, therefore, need the crowns that are a particular part of the wedding of the Eastern Church<sup>58</sup>.

During the *νυμφαγώγιον* in the evening, the people (ό λαός) and the cantors (*οἱ κράκται*) were reciprocating wishes and greetings, one of these wishes is to protect God, the Holy Triad, the *paranymphs*: “Οσα δεῖ παραφυλάττειν ἐπὶ νυμφαγωγίῳ. Τῇ ἐσπέρᾳ ἀπέρχονται τὰ δύο μέρη μετὰ καὶ τῶν ἴδιων ὁργάνων, καὶ τῆς νύμφης κατιούσης καὶ ὀψικευομένης ὑπὸ πληθίων καὶ χειροκυμβάλων, μετὰ τὸ καβαλικεῦσαι αὐτὴν ἵσταται, καὶ ἀκτολογοῦσι τὰ δύο μέρη ταῦτα: «Καλῶς ἥλθες, θεοστέπτων ἡ δούλη»..... Οἱ κράκται: “Αγιε, τρισάγιε, τοὺς παρανύμφους φύλαξον<sup>59</sup>: (In the evening the two factions go away, along with their particular organs and the bride descends accompanied by stringed instruments and cymbals. After going on horseback she stops and the two factions recite these acclamations: “Welcome, servant of the divinely crowned rulers” ... The cheerleaders: Holy God, guard the newly weds). Before the 14th cent. A. D., on the occasion of the principal and royal marriages, the new married couple had to conduct the *πρόσκυψις* which is an elevated platform and an imperial ceremony performed on that structure at the Comnenian and Paleologian court. This ceremony was performed for imperial weddings<sup>60</sup>. The royal couple was to go up with the parents of the bridegroom and the *paranymphs* on scaffolding surrounded by gold and silk curtains<sup>61</sup>.

57. *De Cerimoniis*, Chapter 82: ... τῶν νεονύμφων ἐξιόντων ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας μετὰ καὶ τῶν παρανύμφων ... [CSHB, 221=PG 112, 680]. *De Cerimoniis* (ed. VOGT), v. 2, p. 181, <sup>1-3</sup>.

58. Theophylact Simocatta [as in. n. 43].

59. *De Cerimoniis* [CSHB, 220-221=PG 112, 679-680]. *De Cerimoniis*, (ed. VOGT), vol. 2, p. 180, lines. 1-13 [transl. MOFFATT-TALL, v. 1, 379-380].

60. *ODB*, v. 3, 1732, 1733.

61. KOUKOULES, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμός*, v. 4, 135.

The *paranymph* would go abroad, i. e. from a country to another, to fetch the bride for the bridegroom. As we read in *Historia Turcobyzantina* of Michael Ducas (15th cent. A. D.) we find that: ‘Ο δὲ Μονράτ διαβάς τὸν ποταμὸν καὶ ἐν Ἀδριανοῦ κατανήσας στέλλει τὸν Σαρογεῖαν ὡς νυμφαγωγὸν τοῦ ἀγαγεῖν τὴν νύμφην ἐκ τῆς Σερβίας (After crossing the Danube, Murad returned to Adrianople and dispatched Saruja to escort his bride from Serbia)<sup>62</sup>.

Beside all the ordinary roles played by the *paranymph* in ancient Greece, the role played by the *paranymph* in Byzantium seems to be developed impressively, this time spiritually, since in the Oriental churches, the *paranymphs* were called also “the common witnesses”, and they are witnesses not only to a juridical act but are also involved in the sacred rite of marriage as “spiritual sponsors”. For this reason, besides the use of reason and the ability to comprehend the event that takes place, the witnesses must actually believe in the sacrament of the matrimony and be willing to help out the spouses to live faithfully the sacred union of marriage<sup>63</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the Church Fathers, during the Byzantine Era, used some of the aforementioned words denoting the *paranymph* but in a metaphorical way; they use the verb *νυμφαγωγέω* with reference to virgin souls being espoused to Christ and a bishop being espoused to his see<sup>64</sup>, *νυμφαγωγία* with reference to the marriage between God and the Church, *νυμφευτής* with reference to God as a bridegroom’s man of Adam after creating Eve<sup>65</sup> and *νυμφοστόλος* with reference to the Creator Who is the first escorting of marriage since He co-united the first created man and woman with the matrimonial bond<sup>66</sup>.

62. *Historia Turcobyzantina*, ed. V. GRECU, *Ducas. Istoria Turco-Bizantina (1341-1462)* [Scriptores Byzantini 1. Bucharest 1958]; Ch. 30, Sec. 3, 1-3, p. 259 [translated by H. MAGOULIAS, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, Detroit 1975, 176].

63. B. FARCAS, *The Canonical Form of Marriage in Latin Law and in Oriental Law: A Comparative Study with References to the Application of Catholic-Byzantine Law to Selected Pastoral Concerns in Eastern Europe* (Ph. D. Dissertation), The Catholic University of America 2010, 197, 198.

64. G. W. H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, 927.

65. LAMPE, *Lexicon*, 928.

66. Καὶ τοῦ γάμου πρῶτος νυμφοστόλος ἐστὶν ὁ Δημιουργὸς τοὺς πρωτοπλάστους

Much of the evidence presented above depicts the *paranymph* as a person involved in the marital relationships, and, more specifically with weddings. Also, he seems always to be in some relation to the bride and the bridegroom like a close friend, a relative or an office in the Imperial Court, i. e. of Byzantium.

In this research we have endeavoured to sketch a broad survey of the social position of the *paranymphs* in ancient Greece and Byzantium in the context of the history of the *paranymphs*' position in general, and to stress the differences of the roles played by the *paranymph* during the history of ancient Greece and Byzantium. From the texts examined above we conclude that the offices assigned to the *paranymphs*, in ancient Greece, were numerous and important; their offices were threefold: before, at and after the marriage.

1. The "friend" of the bride and bridegroom performed duties before the wedding, such as adoring the bride (fem.), fetching her from her fathers' house (mal.), securing the venue (mal.) escorting her along the road (fem.).

2. At the time of the wedding, the *paranymph* continued with them during the marital ceremony, allotted for the wedding festival as a bride-leader (mal.), a torch-bearer (mal.) and a door-keeper of the marriage chamber during the first bridal night (mal. & fem.).

3. After the wedding, the *paranymph*'s care and assistance continued after the newlywed couple began living together where the *paranymph* was considered as the patron (mal.), advocate (fem.) of the wife and her husband after marriage.

About Byzantium however, the texts do not give more details about the role of the *paranymph* in simple weddings, but it seems it was similar to that role the *paranymph* played in ancient Greece; it developed impressively since the *paranymph* becomes one of the men of the Imperial Court. From the available evidence as to the *paranymph*'s other possible specific tasks and roles on the occasion of a wedding ceremony we conclude that the ancient Greek tradition of wedding crowns has been held by the Orthodox Church till today. The role of the *paranymph* after marriage was to abolish any

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ἀνθρώπους τῷ γαμικῷ συζεύξας δεσμῷ: Asterius of Amasea, *Homiliae* 1-14, ed. C. DATEMA, Leiden 1970, Hom. 5, Ch. 3, Sec. 4.<sup>2,3</sup>

differences which might happen between wife and husband, and reconcile them when they had been at variance. The *paranymph* was considered the patron and advocate of the wife and in some sort her guardian<sup>67</sup>.

The same role of the “*paranymph*” still exists till now in modern times in the Greek society; we refer also to the best man of the bridegroom, as well as a companion called “*κουμπάρος*” or “*κουμπάρα*”<sup>68</sup>. This word, derived from the Venetian word “*compare*” from Late Latin “*compater*” < “com-(*cum*) + *pater*” which means “with father”, who had in the wedding a similar position to that of the *paranymph*<sup>69</sup>. These two words “*κουμπάρος*” and “*κουμπάρα*”, which began to appear in the modern Greek texts and they are used to refer to the *paranymph*, imply that the *paranymph* is no longer just the “friend of the bridegroom” but rather his spiritual father or the person who becomes related in a spiritual relationship with the wife and husband<sup>70</sup>.

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67. This role is played by St. Paul the Apostle who considered himself the *paranymph* of Jesus Christ saying: ζηλῶ γὰρ ὑμᾶς Θεοῦ ζῆλωρ ἡρμοσάμην γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἀνδρί, παρθένον ἀγνὴν παραστῆσαι τῷ Χριστῷ [For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused (ἡρμοσάμην) you to one husband, that I may present (παραστῆσαι) you as a chaste virgin to Christ, (2 Corinthians 11: 2)].

68. N. ANDRIOTIS, Έτυμολογικὸν Λεξικὸν τῆς Κοινῆς Νεοελληνικῆς, Thessaloniki 1983, 171.

69. M. MITTERAUER, *Geistliche Verwandtschaft im Kontext mittelalterlicher Verwandtschaftssysteme*, in K.-H. SPIESS (Hg.), *Die Familie in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters* (Vorträge und Forschungen 71), Ostfildern 2009, 171-194.

70. Γ. Δ. ΜΠΑΜΠΙΝΙΩΤΗΣ, *Λεξικό της Νέας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας με σχόλια για τη σωστή χρήση των λέξεων, Ερμηνευτικό, Ετυμολογικό, Ορθογραφικό, Συνανύμων - Αντιθέτων, Κυρίων ονομάτων, Επιστημονικών όρων, Ακρονυμίων*, 2nd ed., Αθήνα 2002, 944.



Fig. 1. Detail from the so-called Kerch lekanis: Drawings of the main scene, showing wedding preparations (A. FURTWÄNGLER - K. REICHHOLD, *Griechische Vasenmalerei: Auswahl hervorragender Vasenbilder*, München 1909. pl. 68).



Fig. 2. Marriage of Alexander and Roxanne (source: wikipedia.org).



Fig. 3. A wedding procession. Neck-amphora, ca 540 B.C.; Archaic; black-figure attributed to Exekias (source: [www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/6998](http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/6998)).

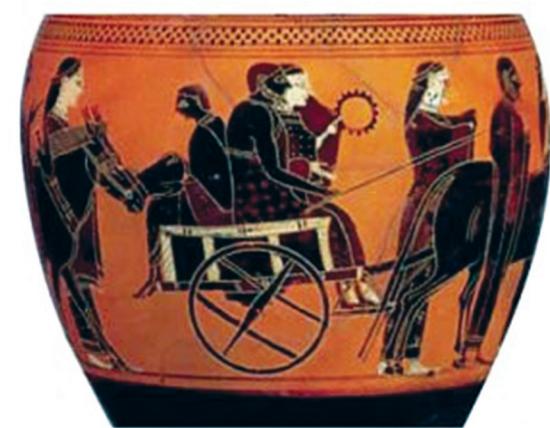


Fig. 4. A wedding carriage with the bride, the bridegroom and the parochus (An Attic black-figure vase, ca. 550 BC) (source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>).

**Ο ΠΑΡΑΝΥΜΦΟΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΡΧΑΙΑ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟ**  
**ΜΕΛΕΤΗ ΣΧΕΤΙΚΑ ΜΕ ΤΗΝ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ**

Σε βασικά εγχειρίδια όπως το Oxford Classical Dictionary και το Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium δεν συναντάται λήμμα σχετικό με τον παράνυμφο. Αυτή η παράλειψη δεν πρέπει να θεωρηθεί ότι δηλώνει πως ο ρόλος του παρανύμφου δεν ήταν σημαντικός τόσο για την αρχαία, όσο και για την βυζαντινή κοινωνία.

Την σημασία του παρανύμφου και του ρόλου του τόσο στην αρχαιότητα, όσο και στο Βυζαντιο επιχειρεί να καταδείξει η παρούσα μελέτη.

