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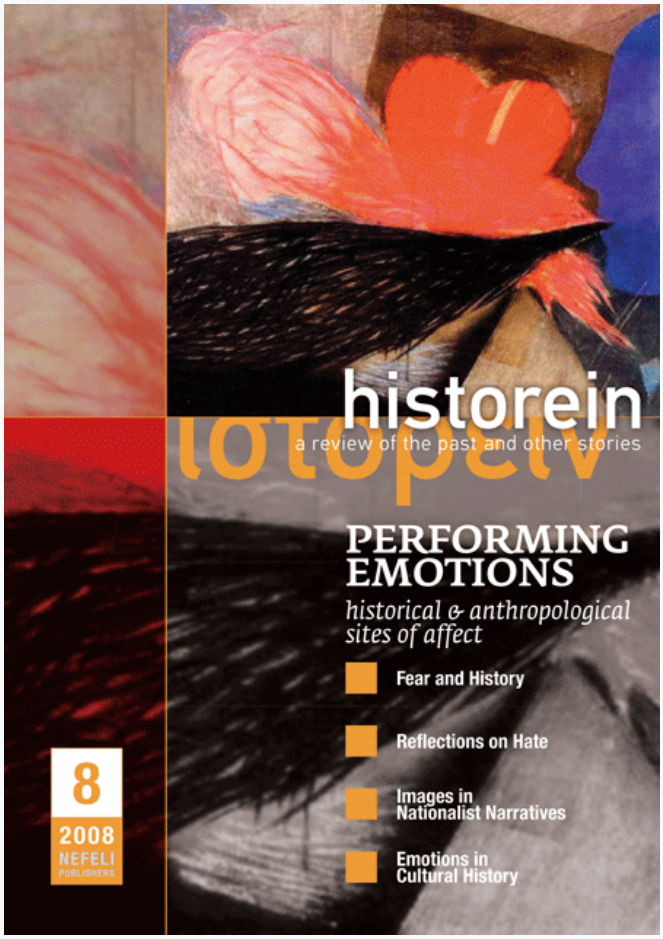

Relationships of Affection. Relationships of Power: Death and Family Grieving in the Islands of the Aegean, 17th–18th Centuries

Eleftheria Zei

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Relationships of Affection. Relationships of Power: Death and Family Grieving in the Islands of the Aegean, 17th–18th Centuries

Eleftheria Zei

University of Patras

Around 1700, J. P. Tournefort was travelling in the Aegean. By that time, Ottoman sovereignty in the archipelago had been achieved and its institutions, especially its taxation system, were starting to take on their final form; on the other hand, the presence of the Latin element, secular as well as religious, with the exception of the Jesuits, was steadily diminishing, to the benefit of the Orthodox communities. In his travel account, Tournefort describes, among other things, the funeral customs of the Orthodox populations of the archipelago. Taking the funeral of the wife of an elder of Milos as an example, he describes an extensive ritual organised in three stages: the moment of death; the hierarchically arranged funeral procession from the settlement to the church, where the funeral service was held; and the memorial service over the grave (possibly in the same church) nine days later. In his account, he stresses the element of the public collective lamentation: firstly, the presence of keening women who mourn the deceased for a fee during the three abovementioned stages and who resort to, besides the 'mournful' verses of the dirge, an emphatic body code: woeful shrieks or even screams, breast beating, hair pulling; and secondly, the public lamentation of the relatives, men as well as women, which was subject to the same code of expression. However, on some islands, such as Mykonos, during the same period, he observes that the funeral, conversely, was a simple procedure: the deceased was carried quickly to the central square where a few prayers were said, and was then buried in the churchyard; the public lamentations were limited, while the relatives (and, possi-

bly, friends) were in the habit of retreating to the home to mourn among themselves, from the day after the funeral, resorting to less demonstrative body codes: the traveller typically uses the terms tears, crying (*larmes*, *pleurs*) and sobs (*sanglots*).[1] Pouqueville observes the same differences, in a more schematic manner, much later at the start of the nineteenth century on the occasion of the funeral of community leader in the Peloponnese.[2]

Anthropological consideration on collective and individual mourning, male as well as female, and on the management of body language (*gestes*), starting from Marcel Mauss,[3] represents a vast, well-studied and well-documented field[4] which will not concern us here; the range of corresponding historical considerations appears to be more restricted, less systematic and less autonomous, as it is registered in a more general, older discussion on "sensibilities",[5] attitudes and behaviours, and more recently on a discussion on "*gestes*", while undoubtedly constituting a significant chapter of the history of death. Yet, the terms and consequently the conceptual tools continue to pose a difficulty for historians.[6] Recently the historian Elisabeth Pavan-Crouzet formulated an interesting semiotic distinction: sentiment (in this case grief) is transformed into "emotion" (in this case emotion or trepidation in face of death) when it performs a communicative function, addresses meanings to a recipient or recipients, and, consequently, when it constitutes a sign and creates language.[7] Barthes had already alluded to this distinction in his game of words between *sensibilité* and *sensiblerie* of tears.[8] All this, however, remains at the stage of linguistic-tool experimentation. What is interesting is that, under a new light shed by contemporary considerations, anthropologists as well as historians, while not having ceased to face emotion as bearing meaning, as a psychological 'language' of the mental representations or the cultural stereotypes of a society, are tempted to study it as a social, 'political' act with specific historical social actors,[9] thus achieving an anthropocentric turn of the field with a new meaning. If the language of emotion can "create or reproduce social identities and relations",[10] then the actual scope of study is no longer the 'signs', but again human societies, where the classical problem of structures and relations of power is now approached through non-classical, peripheral and hidden connotations, nonetheless belonging to the deep, human matter of history: it is this matter to which emotion belongs. From this aspect, a history of the changes in the 'language' of grief would constitute, among others, a chapter, often exciting, in a less visible and more penetrating history of power and the groups wielding power, in this case the modern societies of the Greek archipelago within the framework of the Mediterranean and the critical turn from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century.

At the end of the seventeenth century, a domestic ruling society seems to emerge,[11] secular as well as religious, since its emergence coincides, among others, with the change of the ecclesiastical organisation of the Orthodox communities of the Aegean from the system of patriarchal exarchates to the system of autonomous metropolises and archdioceses. The basic core of this society is comprised of people from the Phanariote world, whose origins were in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire and who studied in Europe and who had replaced the old Byzantine aristocracy in the higher echelons surrounding the Patriarchate and the sultan. From the end of the seventeenth century, the descendants of this circle return to their place of origin on the mainland or to the islands as consuls, voivods (lessees of tax revenues) and commissaries of parish councils: in other words, as intermediaries between the Ottoman administration and the subordinate

population. There they contract relations by marriage – through marriage strategies – with local families (Orthodox, Catholic or other Latins who have adopted the Orthodox faith) – and invest the ready money that their families have accumulated (often from the leasing of patriarchal revenues) in real estate but also in commerce and lending: this was, for instance, the case of the renowned Mavrogenis family of the archipelago.

This new elite that establishes itself and develops on the islands does not forget to claim the actual as well as the symbolic capital of its predecessors: the possession of land and the revenue it produces always constitute the real raw material, and the distribution of family property, even the drawing up of a will, is the basic mechanism through which its social identity is maintained and reproduced at the critical moment of death; nor does it forget to claim the representations of the old bankrupt 'nobility', both the eastern (Byzantine) and the western (Venetian), even borrowing its symbols: it dresses, in this case, its deceased in their best clothes; it accompanies the funeral procession with an open coffin through the settlement where the place of the relatives, the higher clergy, often of both faiths, as well as the distinguished members of society, is hierarchically ordained; it uses wax candles, lace and artificial flowers, brought from Venice, for example; it wears colourful clothes at funerals, as travellers note, and why not; it employs the most expensive professional mourners, paying them in cash and kind, to publicly express and demonstrate its grief.

However, if the noblemen or the elders of the islands at the end of the seventeenth century behaved like miniatures of the old Latin or Byzantine princes, they were not impermeable to the transformations which Phanariote society in general was undergoing and which have been studied in recent years:[12] on account of their Western education and their experience with the sovereign royal courts along the Danube and in European embassies, the Phanariotes of the seventeenth century developed an economical and social ideology that generally found its theoretical grounding in a notion of private 'property' as the basic pillar of social 'wealth'. Since the beginning of the seventeenth century in Europe, Antoine de Montchrestien,[13] the Italian theoreticians of the state[14], and, of course, Thomas Hobbes[15] had considered the common good and common prosperity as the sum of individual interests and individual effort to gain wealth; much later, dragoman and Ottoman secretary of state Alexandros Mavrokordatos would establish the term of "virtuous selfishness" in the Ottoman milieu.[16]

Did this new ambient ideology, along with the expansion of the financial activities as well as the social and political role of this elite which came about as a result of the extension of Ottoman sovereignty and its administrative and taxation system over the islands, change the psychology and consequently the emotional behaviour of island society? The family provides a privileged field of observation for that. It is interesting that the hereditary rights of the times began to show sporadic shifts, undoubtedly slow and unequal, from the blood relations of the maternal or paternal line, which were prevalent in the Aegean, to the line by marriage: it may not be by chance that, from the end of the seventeenth century and undoubtedly during the following century, judicial rulings and clauses settling or reinforcing the hereditary rights of in-laws became more common. The greatest number of hereditary transfers among in-laws are found in those cases which conceal credit networks within the family circle and, consequently, new relations of protection which seem to have developed into new emotional bonds. From this point of view,

of particular interest are those eighteenth-century wills in which legators violate the conditions of customary hereditary rights based on the blood line and the right of women, essentially the right of primogeniture, clearly mentioning the emotional argument. Cases include people bequeathing a significant amount of property to second-born male children so that they will not have any grievances about the harsh custom of first-born daughters receiving all the property; a man entrusting the same to his niece because he loves her dearly; or, finally, someone leaving everything to his wife because she was loving and caring and "looked after him during his illness", instructing her to love their child, which he has left without any property even though he is an adult.[17] If the restructuring of authority within the marital family eroded birthrights, and particularly those of females, to property and name, creating new relations of dependence after the legator's death – in which the place of the widow is of particular interest – are invested with new emotional bonds, not only with the deceased, but also with the surviving relatives:[18] it is perhaps in these bonds that we should search for the explanation of the increasing absence of lamentation and expression of grief within the family of the deceased if we are to believe the testimony of the travellers. These bonds finally allowed a tendency towards the individualisation of grief, one could say an enclosure of death within the family, reflected in the reformulation of the introductory phrases in wills: in the eighteenth century, death is described increasingly as the cancellation of nature as it relates to the individual and his relations with the family, and less as a divine rite which incorporates the individual within the broader Christian community of repentance and salvation.[19] This absence brought with it a new distinction between genders: in the nineteenth century, Markos Zallonis, a doctor from Tinos who had studied in France and who was married to a daughter of a Phanariote, wrote that on the island only widows remained closed up in their home for years mourning their late husbands.[20] The nineteenth century has its own, different stereotypes: among these, according to a contemporary effort towards a typology of expressions of grief (which moreover restricted itself to the field of literature), there is also a distinction between tears as an exclusively female code and sobbing as exclusively male.[21]

The shift or the parallel emergence of different codes of grief for the death of family in the archipelago seems, consequently, to reflect the rifts in the relations of power within island society, transforming the social representations and its ideals. Does it reflect, however, the games of social, cultural and political supremacy with the other ruling 'societies' that surrounded it?

It is true that the Patriarchate and the prelates that were well disposed to it used the behaviour relating to death to oppose the new island society: they subsequently made the exhibition of sorrow, public lamentation and the hiring of professional mourners the target of prohibitive orders, justifying these with the need to return to the 'correct' Byzantine typology of the faith.[22] Had not John Chrysostom himself criticised and denounced not only professional mourning but also the beating of breasts, the pulling of hair and the laying bare parts of the body as having their origins in ancient, and consequently, pagan forms of orchestrating female lamentation? In some regions, for example the Mani and certain islands, even the public participation of women in funeral processions or funerals themselves was forbidden.[23]

Nevertheless, this elite later confronted a broader Christian community of the Mediterranean in which contradictions were pervasive; in this confrontation, which left deeper and longer-lasting

traces on its cultural codes, a typical object under dispute was sorrow, and particularly the tears at the death of a family member. On the one hand, the sovereign, seventeenth-century Mediterranean world was drawing to an end, the world of the French traveller, the dynamic elements of which constituted the rising urban social strata, both Catholic and Protestant, who regarded mourning as identical to grandeur, silence and dry eyes: this code was obeyed, for example, by mournful, silent and tearless male pleurers, the monks with covered faces who accompanied the stately funerals of the elite of the French south,[24] where Tournefort lived a large part of his life. The same code dismissed, and often prohibited, every type of ceremony and certainly female lamentation at funerals.

On the other hand, in the seventeenth-century Aegean, there were people and politics who cultivated, provoked and even staged tears: Orthodox clergymen or laymen, monks from Mount Athos, Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries of the Counter-Reformation, and, possibly, missionaries of the Reformation (research on the latter is ongoing), who toured the islands, took confession and preached publicly to reinforce the loose ties of their populations, particularly the noblemen, with the sovereign churches, Orthodox or Latin. At the same time they were bearers of a common interior theological tradition, an "interior world",[25] a product of multiple, often ancient social and cultural intermingling, which disregarded the ruling dogmatic orders and ecclesiastical policies, and which often brought them into confrontation not only with the highest ecclesiastical authority, the Patriarchate, but also with the surrounding 'political' society of the Sublime Porte. Their sermons educated the island society on new forms of religious emotion, on public tears for poverty and scorn for worldly affairs, on the tears of self-denial, of abasement and repentance; their texts came to save their listeners from that 'sinful' internalised sorrow which threw it into the arms of the family, making it forget its bonds with the Christian community and even its dead: "Refrain from sorrow, which does not benefit the deceased but rather harms and angers the Lord. Pray for the soul of your friend, give alms, as you are able, pay the clergy to perform memorial and divine services, which greatly benefit the deceased," wrote the Orthodox preacher in the widely read *Amartolon Sotiria* (*Salvation of the Sinful*). Taking the above into consideration, the historian wonders which society, historical conjuncture and dominant imagination is served by the modern European stereotype presenting Greeks as an emotional people, with tender hearts, always shedding tears over the graves of their dead.

NOTES

1 J. P. de Tournefort, *Voyage d'un voyage du Levant,* vol. 2, Paris, 1717. Here, J. P. de Tournefort, *Voyage d'un botaniste. 1. L'Archipel grec*, ed. Stephane Yerasimos, Paris: François Maspero, 1982, pp. 135–138. For an analysis of the death practices in the islands of the Aegean during this period, see Eleftheria Zei, «Ο θάνατος στο Αιγαίο, 17ος– 18ος αιώνας: μια στιγμή μετάβασης», *Dokimes. A Review of Social Studies* 11–12 (2003), pp. 139–186.

2 F. C. H. L. Pouqueville, *Voyage en Morée, à Constantinople, en Albanie et dans plusieurs autres parties de l'Empire Ottoman*, Paris: Gabon, 1805. For the Greek version, see: T. Vournas (ed.), *Ταξίδι στο Μοριά*, transl. Olga Robakis and Eleni Garidis, Athens: Tolidis, 1980, p. 277–280.

3 With reference mainly to the 'Techniques of the Body', a series of lectures by Marcel Mauss, first published in *Manuel d'ethnographie*, Paris: Payot, 1947, and in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* , Paris: PUF, 1950 (in Greek *Κοινωνιολογία και Ανθρωπολογία*, introduction by Claude Lévi-Strauss, transl./ed. Theodoros Paradellis, Athens, Ekdoseis tou Eikostou Protou, 2004, pp. 185–223).

4 For a concise perception of anthropological as well as historico-anthropological consideration on the subject in general, along with a rich bibliography, see "La réalité gestuelle des sociétés humaines. Une approche écosystémique et anthropologique de la réalité gestuelle et des communautés humaines", in Jean Poirier (ed.), *Histoire des moeurs*. II, vol. 1, *Modes et modèles*, Paris: Gallimard, 2002, p. 163–246. For a review on the anthropological perception of death in general, see Louis-Vincent Thomas, *Anthropologie de la mort*, Paris: Payot, 1980 and idem, *Rites de la mort. Pour la paix des vivants*, Paris: Fayard, 1985.

5 For the establishment of the term in the history of emotion, see Lucien Febvre, "La sensibilite et l'histoire. Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois?" *Annales d'histoire sociale* 3 (1941), pp. 5–20. Note also the alternative use of *sense* or *sentiment* in a similar context: Alberto Tenenti, Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento (Francia e Italia), Turin: Einaudi, 1957; Claude Sutto (ed.), *Le sentiment de la mort au Moyen Age*, Quebec: Les Éditions Univers, 1979.

6 For a thorough historical treatment of the semantic debate concerning a history of emotions, see Jeroen Deploige, "Studying Emotions: The Medievalist as Human Scientist?" in Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Anne-Laure van Bruaene (eds), *Emotions in the Heart of the City (14th–16th Century)*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2005, pp. 3–24.

7 See her introduction in *Emotions in the Heart of the City*, pp. 27–29, and p. 27.

8 Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Paris: Seuil, 1977. Cited in Anne Vincent-Buffault, *Histoire des larmes: XVIIIe–XIXe siecles*, Paris: Payot, 2001, p. 13.

9 For the new debates, see mainly Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod (eds), *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990; Jan Bloomaert, "The Debate is Open", in idem (ed.), *Language Ideological Debates*, Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999; see also Deploige, 'Studying Emotions', pp. 15–24, and related bibliography.

10 Geoffrey M. White, "Representing Emotional Meaning: Category, Metaphor, Schema, Discourse", in Michael Lewis and Jeannette Haviland-Jones (eds), *Handbook of Emotions*, 2nd ed., New York/London: Guilford Press, 2000, p. 30.

11 About this society and the analysis which follows her, see Eleftheria Zei, «Ο θάνατος στο Αιγαίο», pp. 149–186.

12 Dimitris G. Apostolopoulos, *Η εμφάνιση της σχολής του φυσικού δικαίου στην «τουρκοκρατούμενη» ελληνική κοινωνία*. Vol. 1. *Η ανάγκη μιας νέας Ιδεολογίας*, Athens: [n. p.], 1980, and *Για τους Φαναριώτες. Δοκιμές ερμηνείας και μικρά αναλυτικά*, Athens: EIE–KNE, 2003.

13 Antoine de Montchrestien, *Traité de l'économie politique*, 1615. 2nd ed., ed. Th. Funck-Brentano, Paris: Plon, 1889.

14 Mainly Giovanni Botero, *Della ragion di Stato*, Venice, 1589 (French ed., Paris, 1985), and Giovanni Antonio Palazzo, *Discorso del governo e della ragion vera di stato*, Venice, 1606 (French transl., Douai 1611).

15 Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, 1612, and French translation: *Le citoyen ou les fondements de la politique*, Paris: Flammarion, 1982.

16 Alexandros Mavrokordatos, *Frontismata*, Vienna, 1805. Cited in Apostolopoulos, *Η εμφάνιση της σχολής του φυσικού δικαίου*, p. 41.

17 Zei, «Ο θάνατος στο Αιγαίο», pp. 176–177.

18 Bernard Vernier, *La genèse sociale des sentiments. Aînés et cadets dans l'île grecque de Karpathos*, *Η κοινωνική γένεση των αισθημάτων. Πρωτότοκοι και υστερότοκοι στην Κάρπαθο*, transl. Evgenia Tselenti, ed. Evthymios Papataxiarchis, pp. 253–276; see also the introduction to the volume by Eva Kalpourtzi, «Οι σχέσεις συγγένειας ως σχέσεις υλικής, κοινωνικής και συμβολικής κυριαρχίας», pp. xi–xix.

19 Zei, «Ο θάνατος στο Αιγαίο», pp. 177, 179–180 and n. 92 for existing bibliography concerning the writing of wills in the Aegean islands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [Chr. Loukos, N. Matha-Dematha, M. Gianissopoulou, D. Polemis]; see also the corresponding debate on the secularisation of death and the restriction of public mourning in France at the end of the seventeenth century in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Chaunu, Lebrun, Vovelle: La nouvelle histoire de la mort", in idem, *Le territoire de l'historien*, Paris: Gallimard 1973, pp. 393–403. The issue of the restriction of grief and mourning is brought up again by the English sociologist Geoffrey Gorer in the context of twentieth-century Western industrial society ["The Pornography of Death", in William Phillips and Philip Rahv (eds), *Modern Writing*, New York: Berkeley Press, 1956]. Gorer opened the way not only for Hermann Feifel [*The Meaning of Death*, New York: McGraw–Hill, 1959] to break the scientific silence around the topic of death, but also for Michel Foucault [*Naissance de la clinique*, Paris: PUF 1963]; moreover, he also conceived what later appeared as an important cleavage in the study of the Western civilisation after the First World War: the American example, launched by Roger Caillois [*Quatre essais de sociologie contemporaine*, Paris: Perrin, 1951] and made known by Jessica Mitford [*The American Way of Death*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963]. On the other hand, the "American refusal of death" seemed to find the approval of medicine and psychology in the collective work under the direction of Orville J. Brim, *The Dying Patient*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation 1970, to be finally established as a general immanent attitude in contemporary Western society, setting the boundaries of modern subjectivity: induced by a new conscience of the ambiguity and irrationality of death, the individual is led to inexpression and silence, according to Vladimir Jankélévitch in *La mort*, Paris: Flammarion 1966, particularly pp. 37–131. This idealistic consecration of the "refusal of death" came to grips with the critical, Marxist approach of the Frankfurt School [Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Amsterdam: Querido, 1947], later taken up by Jean Baudrillard [*L'échange symbolique et la mort*, Paris: Gallimard, 1976]. The debate soon spread in (French) historiography: Edgar Morin, *L'homme et la mort devant l'histoire*, Paris: Corréa, 1951; Philippe Ariès, *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen age à nos jours*, Paris: Seuil, 1975, pp. 155–210, 227–234, and *L'homme devant la mort*, Paris: Seuil, 1977, Greek version: *Ο άνθρωπος ενώπιον του θανάτου. 2. Ο εξαγριωμένος θάνατος*, transl. Th. Nikolaidis, Athens: Hestia, 1999]. Closer to the Marxist analysis, see Michel Vovelle, *La mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983 (in Greek *Ο θάνατος και η Δύση από το 1300 ως τις μέρες μας*, transl. Kostas Kouremenos, Athens, Nefeli, 2000, in part. vol. 2, pp. 353–454). For a concise review of the above debate, see also the works of Douglas J. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief*, London: Continuum, 2002 and *A Brief History of Death*, London: Blackwell, 2005 (in Greek *Θάνατος: Μια σύντομη ιστορία*, transl. I. F. Andreadi, pref. G. Andreadis, Athens: Polytropon, 2007, esp. pp. 96–125); for an attempt to a theoretical genealogy of the debate, see Myrto Rigou, *Ο θάνατος στη νεωτερικότητα. Μια επικοινωνιακή και ηθική προβληματική*, Athens: Plethron, 1993.

20 Marc-Philippe Zallony, *Voyage à Tine, l'une des îles de l'Archipel de la Grèce suivi d'un traité de l'asthme*, Paris 1809 [in Greek Markos-Phillipos Zallonis, *Ιστορία της Τήνου μεταφρασθείσα εκ του γαλλικού μετά τινών παρατηρήσεων υπό του διδασκάλου Δ. Μ. Μαυρομαρά*, Athens: Eirini, 1997, pp. 84–85.

21 Vincent-Buffault, *Histoire des larmes*, pp. 257–264.

22 Dimitris S. Loukatos, «Λαογραφικαί περί τελευτής ενδείξεις παρά Ιωάννη Χρυσοστόμω», *Epetiris toy Laografikou Archeiou* (1940), 63–64. During the Enlightenment the issue of the Greek national origin of these practices was vehemently discussed, see also the related bibliography for the renowned debate on the regularity of memorial services and offering of "collyva", in which Korais formulated the argument about the ancient Greek origin of those 'popular' memorial practices: A. Korais, *Atakta*, vol. 4, Paris, 1832, p. 122.

23 Loukatos, «Λαογραφικαί περί τελευτής ενδείξεις», pp. 56–58, 69–67 (for Kefalonia); for Chios where the participation of women in funerals was prohibited, see: K. Kanellakis, *Χιακά Ανάλεκτα*, Chios, 1983 (2), p. 338.

24 Michel Vovelle, *Ο θάνατος και η Δύση*, pp. 97–101, about the claim to tears in the eighteenth century, see also Philippe Ariès, "La mort de toi", *Essai*s, pp. 51–65.

25 Spyros I. Asdrachas, «Η διπλή παράδοση», in idem, *Ιστορικά απεικάσματα*, Athens: Themelio, 1995, pp. 49–55.