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DEATH AND ASCENT OF HYAKINTHOS IN SPARTA: Ritual Mourning and Feasting

Introduction

According to myth, Hyakinthos was a youth who was accidentally killed by Apollo but later taken up to Olympus as a god [1]. The first time he is mentioned is in Hesiod, where we are told that Hyakinthos was the son of the local Spartan hero Amyclas and the lapith Diomede [2]. Euripides says that the festival of Hyakinthia was celebrated because Hyakinthos was mistakenly killed by a discus thrown by Apollo during a competition [3]. In Ovid, he is said to be the lover of Apollo [4]. The ascent of Hyakinthos to Olympus following his descent to Hades seems to be an old part of the story, as it is depicted on a relief in the temple of Apollo at Amyklai, lost but described by Pausanias and believed by scholars to date to Archaic times [5].

His festival, the Hyakinthia, is described by among others Herodotus, Thucydides and a historian named Polycrates [6]. All these sources attest to its

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1. First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the organizers Pierre Bonnechère and Gabriela Cursaru for inviting me to this conference. I wish to warmly thank Maria Mili and Michael Pettersson for a careful reading of the manuscript, as well as Frands Herschend for enlightening discussions. My warm thanks also go to Rhona Hammond, who corrected my English.

For a full account of the myth and festival of Hyakinthos, see e.g. M. PETTERSSON (1992), N. RICHER (2004), Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005, p. 122-125), and F. GRAF (2013), with further references.

2. Hes., fr. 171; this story is retold in Apoll., III, 116 .

3. Eur., *Hel.*, 1465-1475. In Ovid, Hyakinthos is the homoerotic lover of Apollo (Ov., *Met*., X, 162-219).

4. Ov., *Met*., X, 162-219. See F. GRAF (2013) on the myth and its variants. Apollodorus, however, makes him the lover of a singer called Thamyris instead (Apoll., I, 16).

5. Paus., III, 19, 1-5. For the date of the relief, see e.g. M. PETTERSSON (1992, p. 11, n. 15-16) and Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005, p. 124, last third of the sixth century BCE), with further references.

6. The main sources are Hdt., IX, 7-11; Thuc., V, 23, 4-5; Xen., *Ages*., II, 17; Xen., *Hell.*, IV, 5, 11; Arist., frg. 532 (Rose); Paus., III, 10, 1 and IV, 19, 4; Philostr., *VA*, VI, 20 and *VS*, II, 12; Ov., *Met.*, X, 217-219; Macrob., *Sat*., I, 18, 2. See M. PETTERSSON

importance for Spartan society, the Hyakinthia being the main festival of the year. In the time of Herodotus the festival lasted for ten entire days while the account of Polycrates describes a three-day festival [7]. The first step of the festival was the mourning of Hyakinthos accompanied by a procession to Amyklai, where his tomb was thought to lay in the temple of Apollo Amyklaios [8]. According to Pausanias, Hyakinthos received a sacrifice "as to a hero" (ἐναγίζουσιν), before the sacrifice to Apollo [9]. Presumably a simple meal was eaten there, without bread. In the middle of the festival sorrow turned to joy, as Hyakinthos was taken up to Olympus and the main divinity presiding over the festival was now Apollo [10]. The festival included musical performances, nightlong dances, numerous sacrifices, big banquets, races and competitions. Youths, both male and female, played a prominent role, and masters also gave banquets for their slaves.

The main function of the festival has been argued by previous scholars to be cyclical with relation to vegetation and growth in nature [11], initiatory [12], as well as that of rebirth of the New Year and reconstitution of Spartan society [13].

The festival probably served many functions [14]. In previous research, the lament of Hyakinthos has been discussed separately from the reversal-theme of the second part of the festival, but I wish to highlight how the two strong emotional ritual elements of *katábasis* and ἄνοδος worked well

(1992) and N. RICHER (2004) for the most detailed account. Polycrates is cited by Didymus the Grammarian, who in his turn is cited in Ath., IV, 139c-f. Didymus lived in the first century BCE (L. COHN [1905], p. 445-472; *Brill's New Pauly Online s.v.* Didymus 1 [F. Montanari]). According to Jacoby, Polycrates might have been a local Laconian historian (Jacoby's comment in *FGrH* 588 F 1); cf. H. J. METTE (1952), p. 1752; M. PETTERSSON (1992), p. 10, n. 10.

7. Hdt., IX, 7-11; *FGrH* 588 F 1 (Ath., IV, 139c-f). See N. RICHER (2004, p. 398-399) on this.

8. For accounts of the festival and its different stages puzzled together through the different *testimonia*, see best Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005, p. 122-123 and 125) and also M. PETTERSSON (1992), p. 9-12; N. RICHER (2004), p. 400-403; F. GRAF (2013), with further references. It is impossible to accurately reconstruct the festival as the sources are fragmentary and were written in different centuries.

9. Paus., III, 19, 3. See discussions in M. PETTERSSON (1992, p. 22-25), N. RICHER (2004, p. 397-398) and Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005, p. 122-123 and 340-341) on this type of sacrifice in the cult.

10. Scholars debate whether the second part of the festival is dedicated to Apollo, or if both Apollo and Hyakinthos, now made into a god, are the recipients of festivity. See e.g. Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005), p. 125.

11. M. P. NILSSON (1957), p. 130, 138-140.

12. C. CALAME (1977), p. 321; M. PETTERSSON (1992), *passim*.

13. N. RICHER (2004), p. 405.

14. Cf. Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005), p. 122.

together in the Hyakinthia, giving it its special character. As for the function of this particular emotional reversal, I will argue that the inversion of emotions also made for an easier inversion of social hierarchies, as seen in the banquet given to the slaves. This also made continued coexistence more bearable for the slaves during the coming year.

Mourning a dead youth

Firstly, the death of the young Hyakinthos, no doubt part of the original Spartan myth [15], has as its emotional focus the lament of a young man who died too young and did not fulfil his aim in life. In the Greco-Roman world signs of mourning would include abandoning signs of social status: wearing clothes of a different colour than normal, abandoning the use of jewellery and insignia of power, as well as untidying the hair or growing a beard (or vice versa: to shave it off, if a beard was in fashion) [16]. Grief, just as laughter, is a feeling that all people have in common, and the display of it might serve as a factor to unite all members of society [17]. This is seen in Spartan royal funerals, where according to Herodotus representatives from all of Laconia, men and women, as well as helots, mourned in great emotional displays [18]. That the slaves should be forced to display grief for the main representative of their enslavement is very symptomatic of the conditions of the helots. In the story of Hyakinthos, considering that he is the son of a local hero, mourning his death might have had similar unifying

15. Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005, p. 125) *contra* M. PETTERSSON (1992, p. 29-41).

16. *Brill's New Pauly Online*, *s.v.* Mourning (R. Hurschmann).

17. The grand and emotionally laden Archaic funerary processions in Athens were restricted by a series of laws, whereas in Sparta this large outward display of grief was restricted to royal deaths by Lykurgos, who in this way also restricted the display of power of noble families (Margaret ALEXIOU [1974], p. 14-23). As Margaret Alexiou points out, the reforms of Athens transferred the funerary ritual, along with the emotions attached to it, from the ancestor of a clan cult to the hero of a state cult. In both cases, members of society are united (but inside of two different social structures). A modern example of a lament for a hero-like figure (but not orchestrated by the state) is the mourning of princess Diana, where the widespread mourning among large numbers of Englishmen (and other nationalities for that matter) as well as emotional intensity of the expression might point to the need for such a ritual also today, where such rituals are not orchestrated by the state (see e.g. A. KEAR, Deborah Lynn STEINBERG [1999] [*Mourning Diana ...*], on the intense emotions, surprising to many, expressed in the collective behavior of mourning).

18. Hdt., VI, 58.

traits [19]. Moreover, an additional reason for grief is that he dies young and before his time in the myth [20].

There are other Greek festivals where the main theme is lament for a dead youth, but those are youths who never ascend from Hades. They are Adonis, Hylas, Skephros, Linos, and Atymnos.

Adonis was a mythical youth of Phoenician origins, who became the lover of Aphrodite and was slain by Ares out of jealousy during a boar hunt. The festival of Adonis, celebrated in particular by Athenian women, seems to have been a mix of lamentation as well as ritual joy and ecstatic dances [21].

The youth Hylas was abducted by Herakles and taken along on the Argonaut expedition, but was kidnapped by the nymphs on Kios, where the focus of an annual festival was the acting out of the process of mourning and searching for Hylas [22]. The festival concluded when sacrifices were made beside the spring into which he disappeared (and thus in a way became immortal).

Skephros received ritual lament at a festival of Apollo Agyieus at Tegea [23]. Skephros appears as the son of Tegeates of Tegea. When Apollo and Artemis were visiting Tegea, Skephros was killed by his brother Leimon, whereupon Artemis shot Leimon. After this, the city of Tegea was struck by a famine. Delphi was consulted, and a ritual lament for Skephros was instituted, and also, other rites to honour Skephros at the festival of Apollo Agyieus.

Another Greek youth who also died prematurely and received lament was Linos. Perhaps originally a mythical person derived from the lamentation song αἴλινος, he soon developed into three different figures called Linos [24]. In Argos, Linos was the son of Apollo, exposed and brought up by a shepherd but killed by a dog. He was ritually lamented by the women and girls of Argos, as well as being the subject of a festival with sacrifice called Arnis, on which day as many dogs as possible were killed. A

19. Hes., fr. 171; Apoll., III, 116, cf. Apoll., I, 16.

20. Apart from the tragic circumstances of untimely death, it was also believed in antiquity that the spirits of men and women who died before their time had to be appeased. Cf. Hom., *Od.*, XI, 36-41; Aesch., *Cho*., 269-296; Hom., *Il*., XXII, 358; *Od.*, XI, 71-73; Pl., *Leg.*, 865d-e. Cf. Pind., fr. 139, 8 on the untimely death of a youth being the cause for a lament.

21. Margaret ALEXIOU (1974), p. 55-58, esp. n. 2 with further references.

22. See Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005), *passim*.

23. Paus., VIII, 53, 1. See further Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005), p. 126, with further references.

24. See overview in Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005), p. 126-128 and n. 63-84.

Cretan equivalent is Atymnos, who died a youth and was lamented in a festival in Gortyn [25].

Further, there is the myth of Hippolytos, who dies and is lamented, but who also receives some kind of apotheosis: in one version he is brought back to life by Asklepios, and in another made into a star [26]. Hippolytos has a μνῆμα, a grave mound, in Athens, as well as a sanctuary where he received sacrifices [27]. Hippolytos was also the object of a cult in Troizen and there he received lamentation from girls about to marry as well as part of their hair [28]. This is a clear initiatory theme of the ritual, just as in the Hyakinthia. In time he came to receive sacrifices as to a god.

Laments for heroes in Greek tradition are thus usually held for young men who had died before their time, one of the most tragic events in Greek society. Most of the youths who were lamented have a connection with Apollo, a natural association one might think, Apollo being the initiator of youths into adulthood. The fact that festivals of lament often have youths who died prematurely as their focus, and that Apollo is often tied to those youths fits together well with the initiatory theme of the Hyakinthia. As a rule, when it is specified who did the lamenting, it is women and girls (the festivals of Adonis in Athens, Linos at Argos and Hippolytos at Troizen). In Sparta, however, it is clear that the mourning of Hyakinthos is done by all members of society, just as everybody was expected to be present at royal funerals. Evidently ritual mourning served a different social function in Sparta than it did in Athens.

In the Greek world lament for the dead was traditionally the responsibility of women, and it was expected to be done with a great deal of emotional display as can be seen in both literature and visual art such as on vases [29]. The restrictive Athenian legislation regarding funeral ritual and lamentation, and whatever political implications these restrictions entailed (it has been argued that this was intended to limit the power of the clans, and possibly also limit the power of women in general), clearly demonstrate that public lament with great emotional display filled a social purpose in Archaic society. In Sparta, the reforms of Lykurgos seem to have channeled this need into royal funerals (and in a way into the funeral of Hyakinthos).

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25. Sol., XI, 9. See R. F. WILLETTS (1962, p. 167) with further references.

26. Apoll., III, 121, according to the archaic epic of *Naupaktiká*, Hippolytos was metamorphosed into a star: Erat., *Katast.*, 6; Paus., II, 32, 1. On Hippolytos in general, see Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005), p. 125-126 with further references.

27. Paus., I, 22, 2; *IG* I^3 255.7; on his cult in Athens: W. S. BARRETT (1964), p. 4-5; Emily KEARNS (1989), p. 173; Vinciane PIRENNE-DELFORGE (1994), p. 40-46.

28. Eur., *Hipp*., 1427-1427; Paus., II, 32, 1.

29. Margaret ALEXIOU (1974), p. 10 and 21-23.

Thus, the emotional ritual of collective grieving was not restricted as such, but the proper occasion for it was now decided by the state.

Apotheosis and rejoicing

Second, we have the theme of apotheosis. When Hyakinthos is portrayed on the statue base in Amyklai, in the midst of his apotheosis, he is wearing a beard, no longer a youth but now a fullgrown man – the apotheosis is a fact and he ascends from Hades as a man rather than a boy –; the theme of a youth descending into Hades is replaced by a victorious man ascending to Olympus [30]. That Apollo presides over this festival is logical, as he is the initiator of youths and one of the principal deities of Sparta.

In Greek myth several Greek heroes were taken up to Olympus, or, as in the case of Amphiaraos and Trophonios, taken down into the Earth instead, but nonetheless having been imbued with divine power. Among the gods helping to carry Hyakinthos up to the Olympus on the relief at Amyklai described by Pausanias there are other humans who were also taken up to Olympus. Firstly, there is Hyakinthos' sister Polyboia (who dies a maid and is carried up together with him). Then there are also Herakles, Semele and Ino.

Semele, the mother of Dionysos, who was more or less accidentally killed by Zeus, the father of Dionysos, was subsequently recovered from Hades by her son and made a goddess on the Olympus [31]. Perhaps because her story is one of success there is no need to lament her death and instead festivals were probably held to celebrate her ἄνοδος [32].

Ino, the sister of Semele and nurse of Dionysos, died because of the jealousy of Hera, but was taken from Hades by Zeus and revered as the goddess Leukothea [33]. According to Pausanias, the Megarians claimed that Ino washed up on their shore and was buried there, and that they were the first to offer her annual θυσία. So, here, Ino being made divine was connected with the city's calendar, but Hyakinthos is even more closely tied to a city's

30. As described by Paus., III, 19, 1-5, by most scholars deemed as a description of an Archaic relief (*supra*, n. 5). The beard has given rise to some speculations. M. PETTERSSON (1992, p. 28-35, 42, 124-125) argues that it might signify that there were two myths of Hyakinthos: one Spartan, ancestral and bearded figure, and one Athenian, young and homoerotic figure, adopted into the Spartan myth. Christiane SOURVINOU-INWOOD (2005, p. 125) on the other hand, suggests that the bearded and now fully grown man represented in his apotheosis fits the association of initiation better than any alterative.

31. Hes., *Th*., 940-942; Pind., *Ol*., II, 24-30; Apoll., III, 38.

32. *Brill's New Pauly Online*, *s.v.* Semele (Th. Heinze).

33. Eur., *Med.*, 1289; Paus., I, 42, 7. See e.g. *Brill's New Pauly Online*, *s.v.* Ino (S. Antoni).

historical legacy: his apotheosis is the focus of a ten-day festival, possibly coinciding with and celebrating the Spartan New Year [34].

The apotheosis of Herakles might be the most well-known and widely depicted apotheosis in Greek art [35]. Numerous cults of Herakles attest to his apotheosis and divinity, and the importance of feasting is seen in most of his cults though this is not specifically tied to celebration of his apotheosis [36].

On the relief in the Amyklaion, Hyakinthos is placed among other heroes being killed by divine interference who were then made divine, but he is the only one of these who is ritually lamented. In this way, the Spartan festival is special and this no doubt accounts for its large popularity. Both in its ten-day and three-day forms the festival makes a quick turn from lament and grief to exuberant joy, a joy in which social bonds between master and slaves, are temporarily dissolved. Callimachus [37], commenting on the Eleusinian mysteries, connects the element of fasting with the ritual derision and laughter produced during the Demeter festival. Apparently the two emotional opposites made for a strong ritual combination also in other important festivals of the Greek world. In the cult of Adonis, which otherwise focuses on lamenting the youth who never returns from Hades, ecstatic dances were an important element [38]. A similar phenomenon may be seen in Roman culture, where the solemnity of funerals was known to have been accompanied by dancers and mime [39].

Psychologically, perhaps grief needed to be balanced by a counterpart. In festivals where the grieved for person is mythically thought to have come back as a god, the release of joy is not difficult to imagine, making celebration that much greater.

What were the ritual functions of this outburst first of sorrow then of joy and celebration? The tears and subsequent laughter may have served, for one thing, to temporarily loosen the bonds of a hierarchical society in a way that apparently many Greek states felt they needed. Similarly, laughter in Medieval carnival festivals seems to have functioned through temporary social dissolution actually to strengthen the hierarchical bonds of society [40].

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34. N. RICHER (2004).

35. *LIMC*, V, 1, *s.v.* Herakles, p. 1-262, esp. VII: "Herakles' Death and Apotheosis" (J. Boardman), p. 126-132; *LIMC* V, 2, p. 115-123.

36. There is no element of lamenting his death, though. Emma STAFFORD (2012), p. 175.

37. *Aitia*, fr. 21, 8-10 (Pfeiffer).

38. Margaret ALEXIOU (1974), p. 56, esp. n. 2 with further references.

39. Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom*., VII, 72, 12.

40. Catherine BELL (1997), p. 126. On carnival and disorganized merrymaking being as much a ritual as any: M. BAKHTIN (1984, *passim*); R. ABRAHAMS, R. BAUMAN (1978). The most common hypothesis on the function of carnival rituals is that they, for

Slaves' festivals

During the second half of the festival there was singing, dancing, joy, a spectacle to watch, processions, and, as Polycrates writes, the city was in a state of agitation and delight [41]. There would have been plenty of laughter too, and joking no doubt. Youths and women played an important part. The male and female youths had a prominent role in the music and the processions, and there would further be nighttime revels, with dancing and feasting, in which the women of Sparta also participated. And, as Euripides suggests, this might be a time to pick out a future bride [42]. It was also the occasion to eat plenty of meat, as many oxen would have been sacrificed. The passage about the citizens giving a banquet for their slaves is interesting. The text clearly reads that the Spartans give banquets to the slaves: δειπνίζουσιν οἱ πολῖται πάντας τοὺς γνωρίμους καὶ τοὺς δούλους τοὺς ἰδίους [43]. Were the slaves invited to the banquets of the Spartans as equals, sitting and eating together with them? The text does not enable us to discern whether the slaves got a separate meal and were waited upon by their masters, or if they dined together with their masters. Knowing the Spartan habit of forcing their slaves to get utterly drunk and be put on display during their banquets to exhibit their inferiority [44], this particular dissolving of social bonds seems unlikely to have been made in a spirit of togetherness (at least in our modern eyes), but nevertheless it fulfilled an important function. A good comparison is the Roman *Saturnalia*. During this festival, the world was turned upside down, the slaves acted as if they were free and the masters withdrew into their study chambers not to be disturbed [45]. It is most likely, in my view, that the slaves were given a banquet of their own at Sparta, but it is impossible to tell for sure, and practices might also have varied over time. The meal itself might have involved some element of ritual jest: the slaves being able to participate be-

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a short time, gave the oppressed classes a window of freedom, as well as an opportunity to imagine a different world order: M. BAKHTIN (1984); E. LE ROY LADURIE (1981); Nathalie ZEMON DAVIS (1975, p. 97-123 and 152-188); cf. Sara FORSDYKE (2012), p. 178. Some scholars argue that an outburst of social laughter such as at carnivals serves to change social systems, but others argue that such rituals, on the contrary, stabilize hierarchies (see e.g. Nathalie ZEMON DAVIS [1975, p. 103] and cf. P. STALLYBRASS, A. WHITE [1986, p. 14] with the modifying view, that these types of rituals do not have any effects on a political system except for at times of political unrest where they may serve as catalysts of rebellion). See further the discussion in S. GOLDHILL (1990), p. 127-128.

41. *FGrH* 588 F 1 (Ath., IV, 139c-f).
42. Eur., *Hel.*, 1465-1475.
43. *FGrH* 588 F 1 (Ath., IV, 139c-f).
44. Plut., *Lyc.*, 28.
45. E.g. H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 136-227.

cause the ritual prescribed it, just as many rituals involved laughter and social norms turned upside down [46].

Another Greek ritual with parallel themes of the world turned upside down (with particular respect to slaves) is the Hermaia festival on Crete, where the household slaves feasted while their owners did all the serving [47]. In the same way, at Troizen during the month of Geraitsios, on one day the masters played knucklebones together with the slaves, and also provided them with a meal [48]. Further, according to Athenaeus, during the Thessalian Peloria festival, a festival originally celebrating Peloros, later celebrating Zeus, the masters served the slaves a banquet during which the slaves could say whatever they wanted [49]. Other elements of this festival, often called the New Year of Thessaly, were sumptuous food, jesting and the release of prisoners.

The Attic Kronia, or festival of Kronos, is described by Plutarch as, like the Dionysia, a joyous and "loose" festival of slaves [50]. Here the slaves would enjoy temporary freedom [51]. Another Greek festival of slaves was the Kissotomoi (Κισσοτόμοι) of Ganymeda or Hebe in Phlios [52]. Here, according to Pausanias, slaves and prisoners would be sheltered and released by the goddess. In Strabo, the goddess of the festival is instead Dia (consort of Zeus), but the enactment of the festival is described in the same way [53].

More dramatically, in Cydonia (on Crete), certain festivals were, according to the historian Ephorus, slaves' festivals, during which free people did not enter the city, and the slaves even had the right to whip free citizens [54].

The Roman *Saturnalia* are the prime example of a society built on slavery having a festival dedicated to "the world turned upside down".

46. See, though, R. PARKER (2011, p. 112), who writes that the banquets given to the slaves were rather a sign of the general outburst of hospitality of this part of the festival. It is true that this was a time of general feasting, but it is something out of the ordinary for the Spartan to serve his servants. The presence of slaves' festivals in other Greek cities opens for the question whether this banquet for the slaves did not also serve a ritual function.

47. Ath., XIV, 639b.

48. Ath., XIV, 639b.

49. Ath., XIV, 639d. Cf. M. P. NILSSON (1957), p. 37.

50. Plut., *Mor.*, 1098B.

51. *Brill's New Pauly Online*, *s.v.* Kronos (G. Baudy); H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 115.

52. Paus., II, 13, 4. See further M. P. NILSSON (1906), p. 39.

53. Strab., VIII, p. 382 quoted in M. P. NILSSON (1906), p. 39. M. P. NILSSON comments that the ivy wreath marking the city on coins and being used in the festival shows the festive and joyous character of the festival.

54. Ath., VI, 263e, quoting Ephorus (*FGrH* 70 F 29).

Saturnalia were called "a Greek festival" by Roman writers as the sacrifice to Saturn was performed *capite aperto* [55]. Nonetheless Roman rulers fully acknowledged its importance. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the week-long *Saturnalia* [56] was its upheaval of the boundaries between masters and slaves, or as Macrobius writes: *Saturnalibus tota seruis licentia permittitur* [57]. In a disputed passage Seneca writes that the slaves of the household would imitate public offices and courts in the family (to be held over their masters) [58]. Slaves would have banquets together with their masters, or before them [59]. As discussed by H. S. Versnel, the core of *Saturnalia* was "the world turned upside down", as shown in the use of the Greek ritual (all things Greek being regarded as eccentric by the Romans), as well as the rule requiring the wearing of Greek garments as opposed to togas (the statue of Saturn as well being clad in a *pallium*), further the unlicensed drinking, the closing of courts, and, of course, the mastery of the slaves [60]. Interestingly, the statue of Saturn in Rome was possibly "chained" with threads of wool, untied on the day of the *Saturnalia* [61]. As Saturn had been fettered by Zeus, it does not seem illogical for an unfettering to be the condition for his return. A powerful myth of imprisonment in the Underworld and return for a day gave rise to the occasion of equally powerful reversals of the common social order. Saturn was indeed a god of paradoxes, as remarked by H. S. Versnel, a god with one of the oldest sanctuaries in Rome yet worshipped *ritu Graeco*, a god in fetters who is liberated on one day, to be then imprisoned again [62].

Lesser festivals in Rome also worked as a reversal of social order: the *Compitalia* and the *Matronalia* were equally times of freedom for slaves,

55. Cato *apud* Prisc., 8, p. 377 H (= Malcovati, p. 35, no. 77): *Graeco ritu fiebantur Saturnalia*; cf. Festus, 432, 1 (L). See H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 39, with further discussion.

56. H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 146: the festival lasted a week already in the first century BCE (Macrob., *Sat*., I, 10, 3, quoting the Atellane poets Novius and Mummius). Cicero, though, writes of a three-day period: Cic., *Att*., XIII, 57.

57. Macrob., *Sat*., I, 7, 26, cf. Plut., *Lyc. et Numa*, I, 1, 4 (75); H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 149, with further references.

58. Sen., *Ep. Luc*., V, 6 (47), 14, and discussion in H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 150, n. 81.

59. Together with their masters: *Acc*., fr. 3 (Morel); Just., *Epit*., XLIII, 1, 2-3; Sen., *Ep*., XLVII, 14; Macrob., *Sat*., I, 11, 1; before their masters: Macrob., *Sat.,* I, 24, 23. Served by their masters: Macrob., *Sat*., I, 12, 7.

60. H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 156.

61. Verrius Flaccus *apud* Macrob., *Sat*., I, 8, 5; Stat., *Silv*., I, 6, 4; Arnob., IV, 24; Min. Fel., XXIII, 5. For a discussion see H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 142-143.

62. H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 142-143.

showing that just as in Greece many festivals recognized this need for the slaves to be free at times in order to endure for the rest of the year [63].

Festivals with an element of "reversing roles" exist in most cultures, and in them during a short period of time social and hierarchical roles are turned upside down: slaves become masters, women men, children teachers, humans animals [64]. Especially in the Greek festivals of slaves the reversal is accompanied by a large intake of food and wine [65]. Slaves were normally not allowed to drink wine or did so very moderately and of course they never ate sumptuously, but once a year their roles were inversed. The classical Bakhtinesque interpretation would be that this festival served as a safety valve in a society that would have perished in internal conflicts otherwise. Now, the Messenians in Sparta eventually gained their freedom, but the Spartan system nevertheless managed to survive for a further 500 years.

Even in ancient times people understood the use of such festivals as "safety vents" in an oppressive society (even though they would not necessarily phrase it that way) [66]. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing on the slaves being freed of their chains on the *Compitalia*, makes this very point:

> In order that the slaves, being softened by this instance of humanity, which has something great and solemn about it, may make themselves more agreeable to their masters, and be less sensible of the severity of their condition [67].

The function of these festivals as safety vents can be recognized also in modern slaves' festivals [68].

Conclusion

There was not one single purpose and function of the Hyakinthia: indeed the great popularity and persistence over time of the festival implies that it fulfilled many important functions for the people and state of Sparta. If we focus on the social functions of the festival, and look at comparable festivals in the Greek world, we can see that the strong emotional combination of death and apotheosis, as well as the participation of all

63. Dion. Hal., IV, 14, 4; Macrob., *Sat*., I, 12, 7; see H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 158, with further references.

64. See e.g. C. AUFFARTH (1991), chapter 1: *Das Fest der verkehrten Welt*. See also H. S. VERSNEL (1993, p. 115-121) for a good synopsis of modern theories on festivals of reversal.

65. H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 115.

66. Colum., *R. R.*, I, 8, 15-19; Solin., I, 35; Macrob., *Sat.,* I, 12, 7; Dion. Hal., I, 14, 4 (cf. Cic., *De leg*., II, 19, 29); See H. S. VERSNEL (1993, p. 159), with further references and discussion.

67. Dion. Hal., I, 14, 4, translation H. S. VERSNEL (1993), p. 159.

68. F. DOUGLAS (1855), p. 253-260.

members of the society both in the lament and in the rejoicing, is particular to Sparta and the Hyakinthia. There are Greek festivals lamenting dead youths and celebrating important heroes who had risen to godhood, but the combined ritual enactment of grief at the untimely death which is turned into joy upon the youth's return is a striking feature of the Hyakinthia, and no doubt contributed on an emotional plane for the popularity of the festival. The element of entertainment and laughter, dancing and even nighttime revelry is striking, and takes its form also in the masters offering the slaves banquets. This ritual element is known from other Greek festivals, and above all the Roman *Saturnalia*. An inversion in the myth (descent to and ascent from the Underworld) parallels an emotional inversion from grief to joy as well as the structural inversion of social hierarchies in the enactment of the festival. Socially, this might have served the purpose of preserving Spartan society, being a recognition and safety vent of sorts for those not recognized as part of the group at other times of the year.

Hedvig VON EHRENHEIM
University of Uppsala
hedvig.vonehrenheim@antiken.uu.se

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