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Pure and Impure Ancestors at Selinous : a note on Greek theology

Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge

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Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greece

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOPS IN KRAKÓW

(12-14.11.2015)



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Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge (University of Liège)

**PURE AND IMPURE ANCESTORS AT SELINOUS:
A NOTE ON GREEK THEOLOGY***

Twenty-five years ago, scholarship about Greek sacrifice and purification was seriously challenged by the publication of the famous ritual tablet from Selinous.¹ Since then, the inscription, dated to the first half of the fifth century BC, has generated an ongoing debate about these fundamental aspects of ancient Greek religion. Among other topics, the complex status of the Tritopatores, the ‘great-grandfathers’, who receive offerings in the first lines of side A, has been extensively discussed. Despite this fact, some aspects of these figures deserve to be reassessed on a ‘theological’ level.

Let us read this part of the legible text where the Tritopatores are mentioned, before presenting the elements under discussion (lines A1–6 are almost illegible except a part of line A3). In the quadrennial

* I warmly thank Krzysztof Bielawski for inviting me at the conference about Greek sacrifice held in Krakow in November 2015. I am particularly grateful to Jan-Mathieu Carbon for passionate discussions about the tablet from Selinous, as well as the ‘cathartic law’ from Cyrene, and invaluable comments on previous versions of this paper.

¹ *Editio princeps*: Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993. Other editions: *NGLS* 27; *IGDS* II 18; *CGRN* 13 (on which is based the text provided here, except line A3). Cf. also, among a huge bibliography, Clinton 1996; Chaniotis 1999: 234–235, no. 45; Parker 2005; Henrichs 2005; Georgoudi 2001; Robertson 2010; Pirenne-Delforge 2011; Carbon 2015; Georgoudi 2015. See the collection of papers in Ianucci *et al.* 2015 with previous and extensive bibliography.

cycle of sacrifices presented on side A, these lines mention the sacrificial offerings to be made on the first year.

- [...]
 [...]
- A3 [...] καταλ[ε]ίποντας, καθαιγίζεν δὲ τὸς ἁμοσεπύος *vacat*
 3 lines with *rasura*
- A7 τὸν ἡιαρῶν ἡα θυσία πρὸ ροτυτίον καὶ τᾶς ἐχεχερίας πένπ[τοι]
 φέτει ἡδιπερ ἡόκα ἡα Ὀλυμπιάς ποτείε τῷ Διί: τῷ Εὐμενεῖ θῦμα
 ταῖς: Εὐμενίδεσι: τέλεον καὶ τῷ Διί: τῷ Μιλιχίοι τῷ: ἐν Μύσφο:
 τέλεον: τοῖς Τρ-
- A10 ιτοπατρεῦσι · τοῖς · μιαροῖς ἡόσπερ τοῖς ἡερόεσι, ροῖνον
 ἡυποληεί-
 ψας · δι' ὀρόφο · καὶ τᾶν μοιρᾶν · τᾶν ἐνάταν · κατακα-
 ίεν · μίαν θυόντο θῦμα: καὶ καταγιζόντο ἡοῖς ἡοσία · καὶ
 περιρά-
 ναντες καταλινάντο: κῆπειτα: τοῖς κ(α)θαροῖς: τέλεον
 θυόντο: μελίκρατα ἡυπο-
 λείβον · καὶ τράπεζαν καὶ κλίναν κένβαλέτο καθαρὸν ἡἔμα
 καὶ στεφά-
- A15 νος ἐλαίας καὶ μελίκρατα ἐν καιναῖς ποτεριδε[σ]ι καί:
 πλάσματα καὶ κρᾶ κάπ-
 ἀρξάμενοι κατακαάντο καὶ καταλινάντο τὰς ποτερίδας
 ἐνθέντες·
 θυόντο ἡόσπερ τοῖς θεοῖς τὰ πατροῖα: τῷ ἐν Εὐθυδάμο:
 Μιλιχίοι: κριὸν θ[υ]-
 όντο, κτλ.

[...] leaving behind, but let the members of the same family perform the consecration [...]

The sacrifice of offerings before the Kotytia and the truce on the fifth year (i.e. every four years) when the Olympiad also takes place; to Zeus Eumenes an animal, to the Eumenides an adult animal and to Zeus Meilichios in (the place?) of Myskos an adult animal; to the Polluted Tritopatores as to the heroes, having poured wine through the roof, of the nine portions burn one; those to whom it is religio-

usly permitted are to sacrifice an animal and perform the consecration (burning); having sprinkled around (with water?), let them anoint (the altar?), and immediately sacrifice an adult animal to the Pure Tritopatores; pouring down honey-and-milk-mixture, a table is set out and a couch and let them throw over a pure cloth and wreaths and honey-and-milk-mixture in new cups and cakes and meat. Having made first-offerings, they are to burn them and perform an anointment, having put the cups on (the altar?). The ancestral sacrifices are performed as to the gods. To (Zeus) Meilichios in (the place?) of Euthydamos let them sacrifice a ram...²

In a recent paper, Jan-Mathieu Carbon contributed to progress in the analysis of this part of the text by scrutinising punctuation on the tablet and trying to bring order to the ritual sequences of the first year of the quadrennial cycle:³

- sacrifice to Zeus Eumenes
- sacrifice to the Eumenides⁴
- sacrifice to Zeus Meilichios ‘in (the place?) of Myskos’
- sacrifice to the Impure Tritopatores
 1. sacrifice – 2. libation – 3. burning of ninth part – 4. sprinkling and unction
- sacrifice to the Pure Tritopatores
 1. sacrifice – 2. libation – 3. cult table and couch set up, including meat offering (*theoxenia*) – 4. burning of first fruits – 5. unction and placement of containers
- sacrifice to (Zeus) Meilichios ‘in (the place?) of Euthydamos’.

The sequencing is only tentative but the respective sacrifices to the impure and pure ancestors are slightly clearer when one considers that lines A10 from ‘τοις’ to ‘μίαν’ on line A12 are parenthetical, a kind of explanation of the sacrifice mentioned by the expression *θύντο θῦμα* coming just

² Translated by J.-M. Carbon and S. Peels in *CGRN* 13 (except line A3).

³ Table in Carbon 2015: 204, with commentary on pages 186–187.

⁴ Two different sacrifices for each recipient (Zeus Eumenes and the Eumenides respectively) and not one for both, following Carbon’s reading (2015: 184–185), taken into account in *CGRN* 13.

afterwards. As Carbon rightly remarks, this could explain the change of punctuation from colons to simple raised dots only in these lines,⁵ as well as the puzzling shift from the third-person singular subject of the verbs *ὑπολείψας* and *κατακαίεν* (lines A10–11) to the third-person plural subject of *θύοντο*, *καταγιζόντο*, *περιρᾶναντες*, and *καταλινάντο* (lines A12–13). The impressionistic composition of the tablet on both sides may confirm that we are dealing with some draft or template, still bearing the traces of two or three different hands and various levels of composition.⁶

The words referring to the combustion of animal parts deserve consideration. In the section of the text quoted above, the verb *katakaiēn* ('to burn entirely') occurs on lines A11–12 (*κατακαίεν*) and A16 (*κατακαάντο*), respectively for the ninth part of the animal offered to the impure Tritopatores and for the first-offerings burnt during the reception organised for the pure ones. In the rest of the inscription, it is used only once: on lines A19–20 (second year of the cycle), *κατακᾶαι* designates the burning of the 'first-offerings' from the cult-table set for Zeus Meilichios, as well as bones.⁷ Another verb implies the fact of completely burning something: *kathagizein*, which occurs on line A3 in a damaged context and on line A12. Even if the result of the act of burning is the same in both cases, *katakaiēn* is the concrete and 'neutral' description of the process, while *kathagizein* is marked language, to be read in the sense of 'to put entirely into the *agos*'. The notion of *agos* is difficult to grasp but indicates that 'burning' is a consecration which transforms the burnt part and transfers it into another dimension.⁸ It

⁵ In such a reading, as Carbon points out (2015: 187–188), a raised dot would have been expected between *μίαν* and *θύοντο* *θύμα* on line A12. This would have secured his interpretation.

⁶ See Carbon 2015: 173–178.

⁷ This could be a very rare epigraphic mention of the 'Promethean' rule of giving white bones to the gods, on smoking altars, attested by Hesiod (*Th.* 555–557). Carbon 2015: 193–194.

⁸ Cf. Chantraine, Masson 1954; Rudhardt 1958: 41–42; Casabona 1966: 202–204. Cf. Pirenne-Delforge 2017 (forthc.) on the respective senses of *kathagizein* and *enagizein*, which seem to be conflated in the text from Selinous.

is certainly not by chance that the two occurrences of *kathagizein* are the only passages of side A where specific actors are involved in the ritual. In A3, the subject is the members of a household (*ἡμοσέπτοι*). In A12, the burning in the sacrifice to the impure Tritopatores is to be made 'by those to whom it is religiously permitted' (*ἡοῖς ἡοσία*).⁹ The verb seems to be generic (*katakaien*) when the sacrificial agents are left unidentified (in A11–12, but also later, in A16 and A19–20), and the verb is marked when they are identified (in A3 and A12).

I do not address in depth the occurrence of *kathagizein* in A3, because the poor state of conservation of these first lines prevents us from understanding what exactly was done by the "members of the household". In the context of the sacrifice offered to the impure Tritopatores, the action to which the two verbs (*katakaien* and *kathagizein*) refer is the same in both cases, that is to say, the burning of the ninth part which represents the consecration of what is devoted to the recipients of the sacrifice.¹⁰ The ritual is valid and efficacious only if performed by the right people and, in a non-standard procedure, such an obligation must be duly highlighted. Conversely, the lack of specific agents performing sacrifices for Zeus Eumenes, the Eumenides and Zeus Meilichios points to these being standard procedures. More tentatively, the reference to 'members of the household' in line A3, as well as the lack of information concerning other agents, except 'those for whom it is religiously permitted', could support the hypothesis that the intended agents were those of family groups, and not the whole civic

⁹ On the semantic field of *hosios*, especially in ritual norms, see Peels 2016: 168–206.

¹⁰ Slightly different in Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993: 19: 'we should understand as the unexpressed object of the verb those items that customarily went into the fire – certain parts of the victim, often referred to in *leges sacrae* as *ta hiera*, together with any additional offerings; at times the privilege or duty of performing the act of consecration, of putting the items in the fire, is distinguished from the performance of the sacrifice as a whole.' They seem to draw a distinction between the usual part of a *thusia*-sacrifice and the ninth portion. Clinton (1996: 171) and Georgoudi (2010: 158–159) are right in considering that both verbs refer to the same concrete action.

community represented by priests attached to specific public sanctuaries, even if civic expectations probably remain in the background of all such prescriptions.¹¹

The mention of the ritual ‘as to the heroes’ in line A10 encapsulates particular gestures which include the fact of pouring wine through the roof of some building and the combustion of one portion from the nine.¹² The exact background of the ancestral sacrifices ‘as to the gods’ in line A17 is not entirely clear. Stella Georgoudi sees the expression as a global injunction referring to all the sacrifices mentioned earlier.¹³ But such a ‘summary’ is not usual in ritual norms.¹⁴ It is probably no coincidence that the sentence closes the passage referring to the rituals performed for the Tritopatores. At this stage, the emphasis is put on the fact that traditional sacrifices need to be offered ‘as to the gods’ precisely because an offering ‘as to the heroes’ occurred earlier in the sequence among other sacrificial rituals. Therefore, the injunction is probably contrastive and not a summary of what has previously been

¹¹ The discussion of the ‘private’ or ‘public’ dimension of all these rituals is still open: see e.g. Clinton 1996: 163 (public), followed by Lupu in *NGSL*: 368 and Georgoudi 2010: 157. For Gagné 2013: 450, sacrifices were made by ‘presumably a household, but very possibly a larger kinship unit’. On the complex relationship between family groups and cults of Zeus Meilichios, see Cusumano 1996 and 2001; Robu 2009. An interesting parallel can be made with a story transmitted by Pausanias (1.37.4) and associating an ancient altar of Zeus Meilichios in Attica to the purification of Theseus by the ‘descendants of Phytalos’ after the murder of Sinis, his parent on Pittheus’ side. Playing with the language of the tablet from Selinous, we could infer that Theseus had been purified by a sacrifice made τῷ Μιλιχίοι τῷ : ἐν Φυτάλῳ. See also Plut. *Theseus* 12.1; 8 for this tradition, and Paus. 2.20.1–2 for another context of purification from bloodshed during civil strife, linked to Zeus Meilichios.

¹² One can hesitate between a mere precision of what is expected in a ritual ‘as for the heroes’ or the necessity to define what is not necessarily the ‘standard’ practice in such a ritual (see Parker 2005: 43 on this problem). The first explanation is probably more convincing since the practice of *enateuein* is known elsewhere for heroes. See below note 32.

¹³ So Georgoudi 2010: 162, and again 2015: 229.

¹⁴ As Jan-Mathieu Carbon rightly pointed out to me.

written. Sacrifices 'as to the gods' remain the standard procedure and one must be reminded of this.

After having made a review of the ritual aspects of the offerings to the Tritopatores, one may now address the 'theological' question of their identity as 'pure' and 'impure' recipients. The terms of the discussion are rather simple. According to the first editors, the rituals to the 'great-grandfathers' were intended to convert impure Tritopatores into pure ones.¹⁵ On the contrary, Kevin Clinton has argued that there were two different types of ancestors, polluted and pure ones, to which different rituals were performed according to their respective status.¹⁶ According to him, these entities may have had 'two precincts, but if so, both were evidently served by a single altar.'¹⁷ Clinton has been largely followed in his interpretation of two different groups of ancestors.

Paradoxically, the first editors and Clinton have built a part of their respective interpretations on the same passage of Pausanias.¹⁸ In Book 8, on the road from Megalopolis to Messene, the traveller visits two neighbouring sacred places of goddesses that he identifies with the Eumenides, 'the benevolent goddesses'. The first place is called *Maniai* ('Madnesses'), just as the goddesses themselves, and the name of the second is *Ake* ('Healings'). Both sanctuaries are related to the story of Orestes: the hero is supposed to have become mad at *Maniai*, as punishment for killing his mother, and then to have been cured in the sanctuary at *Ake*, after he bit off and ate one of his fingers. The goddesses appear black to Orestes when he lost his mind and white when he recovered his senses. Therefore, he performed an *enagismos*-sacrifice for the black goddesses to avert them, and a *thusia*-sacrifice for the white ones (the latter clearly in thanksgiving, since Pausanias refers to an additional sacrifice to the Charites traditionally performed at the site). In Pausanias' use of the sacrificial vocabulary, the verb *enagizein*

¹⁵ Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993: 29, 53, 111.

¹⁶ Clinton 1996: 172.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Paus. 8.34.1–3. Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993: 53; Clinton 1996: 172.

means the combustion of the whole offering, while *thuein* is the regular practice with only a small part to be burnt.¹⁹

The evidence presented by Pausanias is complex because he refers to various levels of information: local sanctuaries with transparent names, his own interpretation of the local goddesses, the aetiology involving Orestes's torments, as well as mythical sacrificial procedures, probably related, in some (unknown) way, to the offerings effectively made in these Arcadian sanctuaries.²⁰ Such narrative complexities partly explain why it is possible to build contrary interpretations on the same text. In the background of Pausanias' own interpretation of the black and white goddesses are the figures of the Erinyes who become the 'benevolent' Eumenides in the eponymous tragedy of Aeschylus. In some sense, Jameson, Jordan and Kotansky have incorporated the process of divine transformation staged on the tragic scene in their interpretation of the Selinuntian Tritopatores. However, contrary to their view of these Sicilian rituals, Pausanias' text does not associate the sacrificial process to the transformation of the goddesses themselves. On this point, Clinton is perfectly correct. But this is not the case with his statement that the pure and impure Tritopatores constitute two different groups, like the Erinyes and the Eumenides in Pausanias. For the visitor of the Arcadian sanctuaries, the goddesses honoured by Orestes are one and the same group of Eumenides, and we have to take seriously into consideration the religious conception of a practitioner of Greek religion. Orestes performs the rituals corresponding to the different aspects of the goddesses as he saw them at different stages of his story, and the aetiology matches the two different sacred places attested in Arcadia. The hero is described by Pausanias as appropriately sacrificing to each specific profile of the recipient in a specific context, without considering that the recipient as such was different in both cases.²¹

¹⁹ See Ekroth 1999; Pirenne-Delforge 2008: 187–201.

²⁰ On this point, see Pirenne-Delforge 2008: 232–234.

²¹ On the sacrificial relationship between the 'monument of the finger' and the sanctuary of the 'black Eumenides', see Pirenne-Delforge 2008: 232–234.

But the contrast in interpretation is not only rooted in the narrative complexities of Pausanias's text. *Mutatis mutandis*, a similar interpretative problem arises in some discussions about the connexion between the proper name of a deity and its cult-titles. Some scholars consider that this link was so loosely tied that, for instance, Athena Polias, Athena Skiras or Athena Hygieia at Athens 'were separate and for all practical purposes independent deities'.²² On the contrary, other scholars give to the proper name of a deity the role of potentially aggregating all the aspects of its profile;²³ a god remains the same, in some sense, behind all its figures, in narratives as well as in particular cults.²⁴ This is an important 'theological' point when one tries to understand ancient Greek religion, and even ancient polytheism as a whole. I have explained elsewhere why I belong to the second group of scholars, considering that the name of ancient Greek gods and heroes has to be taken seriously and is not only used for cosmetic purposes.²⁵ In this perspective, the pure and impure Tritopatores are one and the same group of ancestors, just as the Eumenides, as a group, can be both black and white. Accordingly, how can we resolve the question of status of these entities, which is still open after twenty years of work on the *lex sacra* from Selinous?

Stella Georgoudi and Scott Scullion are two of the few scholars to have asked this question of status and in my opinion this is the only way to correctly address the problem.²⁶ Moreover, this dossier is a clear sign that rituals are impossible to understand if one does not

²² Mikalson 1991: 10.

²³ See the extensive discussion in Versnel 2011: 60–87, 517–525.

²⁴ For this thesis, see Pirenne-Delforge, Pironti 2015 and 2016. Long ago, Louis Gernet was already supporting this view (1932: 222).

²⁵ Already in 1994, in my PhD. See also the references in the previous footnote.

²⁶ Scullion 2000; Georgoudi 2010. However, they deeply disagree on the usefulness of the dichotomy Olympian / Chthonian as applied to gods or rituals: Scullion wants to keep it, while Georgoudi struggles vigorously against it. On a more general level, see Henrichs 2005: 50.

take into account the conceptualisation of the supra-human sphere in the Greek world. Another parallel briefly invoked by the first editors in addition to Pausanias, and relegated to an embarrassed footnote by Clinton, paved the way in the right direction.²⁷ In the *Heroicus*, Flavius Philostratus refers to the cult supposedly performed in honour of Achilles next to the ancient location of Troy.²⁸ Thessalians were ordered by an oracle to give him annual sacrifices as a god and others as a dead man: first a black bull was slaughtered at his grave as to a deceased mortal (ὡς τεθνεῶτι ἔσφαττον) and then a white bull was sacrificed to him as a god (ἔθυσον ὡς θεῶ).²⁹ To this piece of evidence, one can add another well-known passage of Pausanias about Heracles and the sacrifice offered to him in the city of Sicyon.³⁰ The aetiology tells the story of Phaistos, a Cretan child of Heracles, who came to the city when the inhabitants were sacrificing to his father as to a hero (ὡς ἥρωι ἐναγίζοντας). He refused to take part in the ritual and insisted on sacrificing to him as a god (ὡς θεῶ θύειν). Therefore, 'even at the present day, the Sicyonians, after slaying a lamb and burning the thigh(bone)s upon the altar, eat some of the meat as coming from a sacrificial animal

²⁷ Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993: 53; Clinton 1996: 172 n. 49.

²⁸ Ph. *Her.* 53.8; 11; 13 (a reference to Achilles' place of worship could already be attested by Hdt. 5.94). On the divine aspect of Achilles in literature and cult, see Hommel 1980. According to Strabo (13.1.32 [C596]), at Sigeion next to the ancient location of Troy, Achilles had a *mnema* and a *hieron*. He only mentions the *enagismos* performed in honour of the hero (and other Homeric figures) by the Il-ians, but the existence of a sanctuary and a tomb could have implied two different rituals, in accordance with the cult described by Philostratus. See Ekroth 2002: 99 and 222 n. 36.

²⁹ In the text from Selinous also, both sacrifices are performed in a specific order. As Gagné rightly remarks (2013: 449): 'One sacrifice follows the other (κἔπειτα); they are not opposed as alternatives but united as a sequence.'

³⁰ Paus. 2.10.5–6. Cf. Scullion 2000: 164 and Henrichs 2005: 52. On this cult in the background of Heracles's double status, see Verbanck-Piérard 1989; Scullion 1994: 90–91; Georgoudi 1998: 313–314; Stafford 2005: 394–395. See also Pirenne-Delforge 2008: 187–190, with a reflection on the way of sacrificing in the region of Sicyon, which provides a global picture of the ritual handling of the sacrificial animal.

(offered to a god), while the rest of the meat they offer as to a hero'.³¹ The local inhabitants did not seem to have completely respected Phaiastos' command since a twofold ritual is performed, which draws attention to the double nature of Heracles as ἥρωας-θεός,³² just as in the case of Achilles at Troy. The difference between these rituals is the use of two sacrificial animals for the Homeric hero, as a dead man and as a god, and of only one for Heracles, as both a hero and a god.

The parallel between the Selinuntian Tritopatores and Heracles is all the more interesting, since the practice of burning the ninth part is attested in two Thasian documents related to the cult of Zeus' son.³³ The *enateuein*-sacrifice performed at Selinous for the impure Tritopatores finds an exact ritual correspondence in Heracles' cult, and the Sicyonian practice evidenced by Pausanias was probably something similar.³⁴ The complexity of Heracles' *persona* does not prevent him from being one and the same figure whose particular course of life has determined a specific status after death. The case of the Tritopatores, as a generic and ill-defined ancestral group,³⁵ is slightly different but the comparison can be illuminating, even beyond the *enateuein*-sacrifice they share, and offer glimpses of a more nuanced situation. In the eternity of the divine world, Heracles is at the same time hero and god, as is Achilles in Philostratus' text. Narratives explain their change of status through their heroic biography, but they nevertheless remain

³¹ Paus. 2.10.1: καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἄρνα οἱ Σικυώνιοι σφάξαντες καὶ τοὺς μηροὺς ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ καύσαντες τὰ μὲν ἐσθίουσιν ὡς ἀπὸ ἱερείου, τὰ δὲ ὡς ἥρωι τῶν κρεῶν ἐναγίζουσι.

³² Cf. Pind. *N.* 3.21–22. The dossier of the double cult of Heracles is complex, with a huge bibliography. See above n. 30 and very recently Pitz 2016, with previous references.

³³ The first dates to the early 5th century BC (*IG XII Suppl.* 414 / *LSS* 63 / *CGRN* 27) and the second, to the end of the 4th or the early 3rd century BC (*IG XII Suppl.* 353, lines 9–10). See Pitz 2016.

³⁴ On the *enateuein*, see Bergquist 2005; Scullion 2000; Ekroth 2002: 221–223; Pitz 2016: 109–116.

³⁵ See the extensive treatment of their figures in Bourriot 1976: 1135–1179. Cf. also Georgoudi 2001 and see, with caution, Robertson 2010: 167–184.

the same recipients in both rituals, with a shift of focus depending on the kind of communication opened or favoured by the actors: in some cases, there was the necessity of reminding that they were once human beings who died, with the risk of pollution entailed by the presence of a dead body, and, in other cases, the wish to honour the immortal side of the recipient, immune to the effects of the pollution caused by death and freely available for interaction. For these figures, well-known from archaic narratives, the ambivalence is clearly marked by their twofold status, hero and god, translated in specific rituals. At Selinous, the ambivalence of the Tritopatores is marked by two distinct ritual performances, as well as by explicit cult-titles.³⁶

These ancestors are identified as 'impure' and 'pure', which means that interaction with them must be cautious in the sacrifice performed in the first case, and more relaxed in the second. There is a graduation from a 'high intensity' ritual to a 'low intensity' one, in two sequences closely connected in time, as indicated by the word *ἔπειτα* which suggests a shift to the pure Tritopatores just after the ritual for the impure ones.³⁷ Accordingly, they had probably only one place of worship with one altar. In this respect, a comparison can briefly and tentatively be made with the sacrifice offered to Zeus Meilichios in the Attic deme of Erchia. In the month Anthesterion, during the festival of the Diasia in the deme of Agrai, a sheep is to be sacrificed to Zeus Meilichios, using 'wineless libations until the entrails'.³⁸ At some point during the handling of the entrails, the ritual starts to follow the normal procedure with libations of wine. M. Jameson has commented on this passage by referring to the ambivalence of the 'Sweet' Zeus, who requires some ritual precaution.³⁹

³⁶ On this point, see Carbon 2015: 197–199.

³⁷ Cf. *IGDS* II 18, p. 50: "Aussitôt (*κἔπειτα*) après les onctions en l'honneur des ancêtres impurs commencent les sacrifices en l'honneur des ancêtres purs". *Contra* Lupu in *NGSL*, p. 375: 'Performance in very close succession is unlikely especially if plastering is involved.' Cf. Carbon 2015: 189, 'immediately, on the same spot.' On 'low' and 'high' intensity rituals, see Ekroth 2002: 325–330.

³⁸ *LSCG* 18 / *CGRN* 52, col. A, lines 37–43 (375–350 BC).

³⁹ Jameson 1965: 162–165.

This is perfectly convincing and, in this case just as in Heracles' cult at Sicyon, Zeus Meilichios is one and the same recipient in both parts of the ritual. If we take into consideration, not the ritual structure as such – which is different from what is performed for the Tritopatores at Selinous – but the shift in the worshippers' attitude with respect to one and the same recipient in a context involving the prosperity of the group, the parallel between all these sacrifices reinforces the idea that the Tritopatores are one group, just like Zeus Meilichios is one god.⁴⁰

But the Tritopatores of Selinous are not clearly labelled as 'heroes/gods': they remain generic ancestors.⁴¹ How can we understand the 'impurity' attached to these figures? A first attempt to understand such a qualification is to consider that some of these ancestors were once impure, for some reason,⁴² and had to be worshipped as such; they can be pure also and the group has to be worshipped in this state too, just as one and the same Heracles or Achilles is both *herôs* and *theos*. A second way of addressing the question of their 'impurity' is to connect this status not with a supposed impurity contracted during the ancestors' lives, but with the fact that they are formerly dead men, and as such potentially the cause of impurity for human beings who come contact with their place of burial. The passage of Philostratus concerning Achilles in Troad emphasises his status of 'dead man' receiving an animal slaughtered at his grave before the honours as a god. For Heracles, there is no grave

⁴⁰ On the Meilichios, cf. Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993: 81–102, in particular p. 95: '... one cannot doubt that their cult [that of the Tritopatores] and that of Zeus Meilichios are closely connected.' See also Cusumano 1991 and 2006.

⁴¹ Demon (327 F 2 Jacoby) identifies the Tritopatores with the winds. In this perspective, see Robertson 2010: chap. 11. In Titanè, near Sicyon, Pausanias describes a ritual performed for the winds in two parts: a sacrifice (*thusia*) on an altar (*bomos*) and secret manipulations in four pits (*bothroi*), which means a propitiatory ritual and an apotropaic one. The connection between ancestors and winds is not self-evident but it is interesting to see that 'mixed' rituals (low and high intensity) can be performed for both kinds of entities.

⁴² It could be the *miasmata* normally met by human beings during their lives, forgotten guilt (Georgoudi 2010: 161) or even 'ancestral faults' (Gagné 2013: 448–451).

where his mortal aspect receives honours, but the ‘heroic’ part of the ritual is a way of recognising his former mortality.

An interesting point of comparison is provided by the fifth paragraph of the famous ‘cathartic law’ from Cyrene dated to the end of the fourth century BC, concerning impurity potentially related to heroes and dead people:⁴³

- § 5 Ἀκαμαντίων ὅσια παντὶ καὶ ἀγνώϊ καὶ βαβάλω[ι].
 πλὴν ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπῳ Βάττω {τω} τῷ ἀρχαγέτα καὶ
 Τριτοπατέρων καὶ ἀπὸ Ὀνυμάστῳ τῷ Δελφῶ{ι},
 ἀπ’ ἄλλῳ, ὅπῃ ἀνθρώπος ἔκαμε, οὐκ ὅσια ἀγνώ<ι>
 25 τῶν δὲ ἱερῶν ὅσια παντί.

There is *hosia* in respect of the Akamantia for everybody, both pure and profane. Except from the man Battos the leader and the Tritopateres, and from Onymastos the Delphian, from anywhere else, where a corpse lies, there is no *hosia* for one who is pure. In respect of shrines there is *hosia* for everybody.⁴⁴

Without discussing in depth such a complex text,⁴⁵ we can see that the Tritopateres are mentioned between the hero shrines (or rituals) of the ‘Akamantes’, whose contact is ‘religiously permitted’ for all, and the human burials which are not ‘religiously permitted’ to people for whom purity is a ritual requirement. The logical link between lines 21

⁴³ Dobias-Lalou 2007: 295–306 (= SEG 50, 1638); Dobias-Lalou – Dubois 2007: 146–150; CGRN 99, lines A21–25 (ca. 325–300 BC).

⁴⁴ Translated by Parker 1983: 336, with slight modifications and a different interpretation of ἀνθρώπος ἔκαμε in line 24.

⁴⁵ In this translation, πλὴν in line 22 has mainly to do with ἀπ’ ἄλλῳ in line 24, even if the connexion with the previous assessment in line 21 would have been syntactically expected. Since Battos – and perhaps the other figures mentioned with him – was buried in the agora of Cyrene (Pind. P. 5.93), the contrast with ‘normal tombs’ (line 24) makes more sense than the contrast with *heroa* / rituals accessible both to the ‘pure’ (priests, etc.) and common people (line 21). See the discussion in Parker 1983: 336–339; Dobias-Lalou, Dubois 2007: 146–150; and the commentary to these lines in CGRN 99 (J.-M. Carbon and S. Peels).

and 22–24 is probably determined by the fact that Battos, Onymastos and the Tritopatores are ‘ancestral entities’ just as the *Akamantes* but honoured in the vicinity of their (real or supposed) place of burial. Despite this potential source of pollution, their place of worship remains harmless for the ‘pure’. Adopting the vocabulary of the tablet from Selinous, we can consider that these ancestral figures were seen as “pure” by the redactors of the cathartic law of Cyrene, removing any doubt about their status which may, therefore, be potentially ‘impure’.⁴⁶ On the contrary, in the city of Athens, the Tritopatores were located in the cemetery of the Kerameikos in an inaccessible place (*abaton*) established on former burials.⁴⁷ The boundary stones bearing their name do not determine them as ‘impure’ like at Selinous, but the *abaton* could be a sign of potential pollution. However, still in Attica, the deme of Erchia honoured these ancestors by a sacrifice with wineless libations and a meal on the spot.⁴⁸ In the former case, entering their place of worship was forbidden; in the latter, it was possible, with some ritual precaution regarding ambiguous entities.

This second explanation, taking the impurity caused by death into account, provides more keys for understanding the pure and impure Selinuntian Tritopatores than the first, which situates a supposed impurity in the remote past of their human lives. The parallel with Heracles and Achilles is illuminating in this perspective, as well as the existence of a broad range of heroic figures honoured in Greek cities, from heroes closely related to their status as ‘dead men’, to others honoured by rituals which are identical to the ones performed for gods. The example of Cyrene highlights such a variety by considering that

⁴⁶ As we have seen, the semantic field of *hosia* is also attested at Selinous, referring to ‘those to whom it is religiously permitted’ to burn the ninth part for the ‘impure’ Tritopatores.

⁴⁷ IG I³ 1066 (445–410 BC). Cf. Georgoudi 2001: 154. See also their presence in a mutilated fragment of the sacrificial calendar of Athens: SEG 57, 64, line 12.

⁴⁸ LSCG 18 / CGRN 52, col. Δ, lines 41–46 (375–350 BC). Another occurrence in Attica (Marathonian Tetrapolis), without any ritual specification but pairing them with *Akamantes*: Lambert 2000 / CGRN 56, col. II, lines 32–33.

worshippers can freely attend some heroic places/rituals but need to be careful regarding others. In the Athenian Kerameikos, the Tritopatores seem to belong to the ‘mortal’ side of the large spectrum between mortality and immortality.⁴⁹ At Selinous, both possibilities are taken into consideration, placing successively the Tritopatores as ‘ancestors’ at different ends of this spectrum. The process shifts from a ritual emphasis on the impurity of death to the ritual performed for ancestral entities whose status of ‘dead men’ is no longer the focus. Accordingly, sacrificing to ‘impure’ ancestors and, immediately afterwards, to ‘pure’ ones does not transform the recipients, but recognises their status at different stages and adapts to the necessity of paying them homage in the right way. As we said above, such recognition implies a shift of focus depending on what is expected by the worshippers.

A last question needs to be addressed. Why did the inhabitants of Selinous feel the need to make a clear distinction between pure and impure Tritopatores, while all the other cults attested elsewhere in the Greek world were performed in honour of the same group without qualification? The argument concerning the potential *miasmata* encountered during human life – which is rather unconvincing –, or the other about the mortal background of these figures, should theoretically apply to any group of this kind, and yet other cities or family groups do not seem to have considered the distinction as explicitly as Selinous. A first possible answer consists in agreeing with the view that Selinous was, in early fifth century BC, a ‘città inquieta’,⁵⁰ a city beset by troubles, internal strife and crises impacting the local socio-political context of the civic community as a whole, as well as particular family groups. In this respect, sacrificing in due terms to impure Tritopatores would be a way of appeasing this aspect of their profile, before celebrating them as positive entities supposed to favour prosperity and procreation.⁵¹ However, as we have seen, the polarity ‘mortal’ / ‘im-

⁴⁹ On this spectrum, see the schema in Ekroth 2002: 330.

⁵⁰ This is the title of the book edited by Iannuci, Muccioli and Zaccarini.

⁵¹ Philochorus 328 F 12 Jacoby; Phanodemos 325 F 6 Jacoby (all these fragments come from the dictionaries of Harpocration, Photius, *Suda*, *Etym. M. s.v.*

mortal' is probably more appropriate for understanding these figures, who can be situated at various degrees of the spectrum. At Selinous, the inherent ambivalence has been clearly brought to light by cult-titles (and the accompanying rituals), while, elsewhere, it was expressed only by specific places or rituals. But the theological background of these entities remains the same anywhere in the Greek world.

* * *

The tablet from Selinous, on side A, deals with sacrificial offerings to be performed mainly to Zeus, whose cult-titles Eumenes and Meilichios can point to sensitive occasions. The sacrifice offered to the Eumenides reinforces the field of action assumed by Zeus Eumenes, just as in a context of conciliation between citizens in fourth-century Mytilene, Zeus Homonoios is honoured with Homonoia.⁵² In Sicily, as well as in Lesbos two centuries later, we encounter an analogous theological articulation between Zeus's own power and its concrete translation in divine entities whose names have a transparent meaning. The sacrifices to Zeus and the Eumenides form the divine part of the penteteric calendar, and the ambivalence of the gods involved in the ritual process is only implied by their respective names and cult-titles. As far as the Tritopatores are concerned, their ambivalence cannot be left unspoken, as is usually the case in other contexts attested by ritual norms. For reasons that largely escape us, all eventualities had to be covered in honouring these ancestral collective entities, who oscillate between impurity and purity, mortality and immortality.

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Τριτοπατόρες. Cf. Georgoudi 2001: 154–155; Pirenne-Delforge 2011: 136; Carbon 2015: 197–203.

⁵² SEG 36, 750 / Rhodes, Osborne 2003, no. 85A, lines 6–8. Cf. Pirenne-Delforge, Pironti 2014: 29–30.

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