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VIOLENCE AND THE WAYS OF ITS SUBSTITUTION IN ANCIENT ATHENS

This article is dedicated to the problem of violence in the culture of Ancient Greece: interpretation of violence, ways of its understanding, and transformation it has gone through. We follow the development of the attitudes of Greeks towards violence and we research the way the image of violence evolved in religion, warfare, and laws. We locate these phenomena in two fields, which supplement each other – theological and judicial. We also research the ways of substitution of violence in Ancient Greek polises.

Key words: violence, Athens V cent. BC, antiquity, ancient Greece, ethos of revenge, city-state, law, religious beliefs, agon, sacrifice.

Violence is one of the motive powers of humankind. It exists everywhere and always, every society experienced the influence of this force during the time of its emergence, existence, and decline.

The culture of Ancient Greece was not an exception. The way ancient Greeks understood violence as it seems could be found in several areas, which influenced each other.

First of all, from archaic times violence was associated with blood feud, which was seen as the first reason for war conflicts. We can see this interpretation of violence throughout Homeric Age. The long-lasting and bloody Trojan War was understood by the poet as the series of huge and small conflicts which resulted from the will of Menelaus and Agamemnon to take revenge on Paris for the abduction of Elena and violation of the tradition of proksenia. The blood feud is also the reason of the majority of wars in ancient myths about the deeds of the heroes (as an example we can mention the cycle of myths about Agamemnon, Klitemnestra and Orestes).

Although, as Lendon points out [18; 8-20], the practices of blood feud vanish in Greek polises by the middle of the 7th century B.C. Nevertheless, the ethos of blood feud, which was the base for these practices, does not. While describing the psychological dimension of violence in the form of blood feud, Lendon stated that at the Homeric Age such kind of violence was strongly associated with the body itself and its injuries. In the course of time, total corporal destruction of enemy transforms into the destruction of the hostile polis. It is underlined by the transformation of Greek polises into the collective unit where there is no place for the individual heroic deeds. No wonder, that during the Classical period the question of interpolis affairs was to be decided in physical confrontation.

Another area which was closely connected to the understanding the violence as well as the war was religion. Two gods were associated with war - Ares and Athena [6]. Ares was seen as the god of war for war, the god of desperate and excessive bloodshed, Athena, on the contrary was imagined as the goddess of just war. Susan Deacy [13; 305-315] mentions that those two gods shouldn't be opposed because they have some common features, for example, battle cry, fearless appearance and fascination with the fight. For her the main difference between Athena and Ares was that she could take her armor off and go away from war, and Ares was always imagined as a god covered with blood who could not exist away from the war. It can be added to this that Athena besides of being the goddess of wisdom and just war, was also a patron of such areas of ancient Greek areas of life as shipbuilding [2], crafts [3], medicine [14] and family life [4].

We see contraposition of multifunctional Athena to single-functioned Ares. Deacy responds to her opponents saying that in archaic and classic age cult of Athena could not give up war – Greeks were no pacifists at the time [12; 151-152]. She states, that worshipping this goddess might be an effort to rationalize reasons and outcomes of war. We might agree with this statement, but with some corrections.

It seems that Ares and Athena are two faces of war – one irrational and more ancient, the other being more rational and younger. Ares dominates in Homeric Age, in times of blood feud; Athena – in later times, when society tries to overcome endless history of vengeance and set violence on a legal ground.

Athena with her multifunctional cult gains symbolic victory over Ares: wars continue, but they become rational and they are no longer main cause in a life of a citizen, making way to new activities, especially politics.

Politics and internal affairs in polices are the third major sphere connected to beliefs about violence. On this matter, we should remember what was political struggle in classic Athens. It was mostly very subjective, personalized and situational. Different groups of citizens, so-called *hetaireiai*, fought each other for power and influence. These Ancient Greek clubs consisted of citizens of equal age, social level and common political interests. Until the end of the Vth century aristocrats were in charge of these groups [7, 19]. Political statements, accusations and polemics were often reduced to personal conflicts between leaders. We can commonly observe that politics was based on ideas of honor and revenge, thus violence was often the price to pay for political actions and political claims.

Laws, crimes and punishments were also closely related to the idea of violence [9]. We can point out two different aspects of violence in the field of laws: beliefs about laws of polices aimed at punishing criminals and transgressors and attitude towards victims of crimes and illegal violence.

As we know, Greeks did not have roman division of crimes on *delicata* (non heavy crimes) and *crimina* (heavy crimes). Moreover, they did not have even special term to mark heaviness of crime [17; 5-18] and even the crime itself. Instead, they had a term *kakourgoi* to name particular category of crimes and number of words from spoken language to name different kinds of criminals [17; 10-11].

We can define few levels of heaviness of crimes in ancient Athens. The heaviest crimes being: state treason, submission of unlawful propositions to the police assembly, insult of gods, atheism, theft of temple goods. Heavy crimes were also: homicide, physical injuries, slander, disregard to old parents, adultery. Heaviest crimes were punished by death with prohibition of proper burial inside the city [15; 94]. Another common punishment for heavy crimes was *atimia* – dishonoring, which resulted in ban from social and public life of the polis.

For repeated theft, the punishment was enslaving. This fact is an argument against the theory of Simon Hornblower [16; 85-90], who stated that polis slavery

was representation of state authority rather than actual violence towards the slave. We see that there was always an option to turn free citizens into slaves as a punishment or as a sequence to conquest of their polis. It is doubtful that transformation of a free man into slave was a simple matter. Another example of actual violence towards slave is Athenian law which allowed corporal punishments only towards slaves.

It is worth mentioning, that believes about crimes in ancient Athens were largely based on believes about injustice (*adikia*). This brings us back to cult of Athena. Her main function (according to Aeschylus) were function of goddess of wisdom and justice. It was believed that she herself founded Areopag, first court in Athens, and it was Athena, to who judges prayed for guidance.

Now let us shed light on the attitude of Athenians towards victims of violence and crimes, which was not that obvious, as it may seem. At first, there was a tradition to carve on a gravestone of a victim an image of two open palms [11; 277] which symbolized praying gesture. It was a pray to gods for vengeance to all those, who were guilty. This custom can be traced to archaic times, when vengeance and blood feud was a rule of conduct. But in classic age this image was purely symbolic act. On the other hand, during burial, relatives of the slain proclaimed a speech in which they took an oath to find and bring to the court the guilty ones [15; 93]. This custom illustrates changes undergone by society from archaic age: blood feud is replaced by legal punishment.

As we see, Greeks thought violence as a part of different spheres of life. This attitude would result in creation of special cultural mechanisms, which could suppress existing tensions and not allow to Dionysian to break through. This schemes of substitution of violence were ought to bring violence out of the society, to ensure its integrity and assent.

For ancient societies, such as Athens, there were just a few such schemes and mechanisms of overcoming violence. This might sound ridiculous, but first one was war itself. One might object, that war is pure violence. But let us abandon this position for a moment. One of the major features of ancient Greek culture was agonality – constant need for competition in all spheres, and especially on the battlefield. Jean-Pierre Vernant wrote on this occasion: «... *War for Ancient Greeks of*

the Classic Period was a natural cause... War was a normal way of showing rivalry and the peace periods are more like the dead areas» [1; 173]. Wars between Greek settlements are known since their very existence. It was a form of ‘bellum omnium contra omnes’, when new wars were just a sequence of relict offenses in the past. The causes and reasons were long time forgotten or no longer relevant, but the wars waged on. We barely can find an archaic polis without ongoing conflicts or active wars.

Each polis tried to trace its history down to heroic epos, referring to all possible connections to gods and heroes: from the founding of the city to heroic deeds of its citizens. In Homeric times each citizen felt himself connected to this heroic heritage. Only war could allow him to transform from law-abiding peaceful citizen to violent and cruel being, guided by ancient feelings of honor, rage and insult – just as were the heroes, praised by epos. Heroes never felt pity or compassion, they never condemned murder, even extolled it sometimes - за словами дослідника Фінлі, «*Iliad is sucked with blood... the poet and his listeners savor every murder» [1;179].*

But as the times changed, so did the wars. Battles of heroes have been replaced by battles of well-organized phalanxes with new battle tactics [20; 130-145]. From now on, heroes remained only in epos, while all signs of individualism on a battlefield, such as seeking of glory and personal success, battle rage, were no longer approved. New virtues of a warrior were quite the opposite: calmness, endurance and self-control – those virtues are needed for the new way of waging wars. Changes in military were determined by changes in social life with formation of polis way of life and polis ‘propaganda’.

As we see, instead of individual hero in classic era there is heroic polis. To illustrate let us remember a funeral oration of Pericles from Thucydides ‘History’: single hero is replaced by collective hero. But as we mentioned, violence in form of vengeance transforming into warfare never leaves in classic era. It still remains in a form of polis wars, or wars against barbarians. This way violence is transferred from inner affairs into foreign act, thus keeping tight polises safe from vengeance conflicts.

In a collective society there is no place for personal heroism. But heroic impulse must be satisfied. The way is found in another form of substitution of

violence in the time of peace – sports (*agons*). Results of sport events depended primarily on individual efforts. Athletic games were held all over the Greek ecumene. The most important and famous games were held at Olympia (since VIII century B.C.). Another major events being Nemean, Pythian, and Isthmian Games (all three known since VI century B.C.). Pan-Hellenic games were half mythological embodiment of all-Greeks unity, as it was believed that during the games all the wars are to be stopped. Games were also seen as a connection between modern athletes and ancient heroes, who were also known for their achievements in competitions: for instance, Achilles and Perseus were famous discobols.

Athletes were awarded with olive wreathes, ribbons and palm branches and mostly no material reward, meaning that games were held for the sake of honoring sportsman's virtues and valours. But games pursued one more goal: finding out the will of the gods. Polis, which won the games, was thought to be blessed by the gods – not only victorious athletes, but all other citizens as well. Hellenic games bared function similar to the function of oracles. Another religious aspect in sport were the ceremonials for the athletes and cults after their death – they were similar to those of heroes.

Religion was dominating ancient Greek's lives. Words of oracles, prophesies, different kinds of fortune telling were determining actions of individuals and whole cities, they were used in political matters. Religion influenced arts and literature. Of course, it is fair to say, that religiousness of Greeks was never quite the same: archaic age with its lively faith, quantity of cults and mass piety is replaced by critical attitude towards religion, 'Greek Enlightenment' and sophists. But even in Classic age we cannot neglect the power and the role of religion: Greeks faith in gods might have deteriorated, but they still used their names in literature and propaganda. Religion still remained in secular life - it just switched to rhetoric dimension.

Sacrifices were religious way of substitution of violence during both peace and war. In Greek mythology anthropomorphic gods could be pleased by offerings pretty much preferred by humans. Valuable animals, which were big fortune in both archaic and classic age, were sacrificed in the name of gods, their meat was served in dishes, wine was spilled and incenses were smoked. In the course of time, procedure

or sacrifices also changed: bloody offerings were little by little replaced by substitutions, though not in all polises [8; 88]. For example, instead of real animals small figures made of bread were offered.

Generally, there were numerous forms of sacrifices in different polises. First of all, the so-called 'simple offerings', or *απλός θυομένα*. They were made in order to thank gods for wellness and mercy or in order to earn their blessing for future. During these offerings, sacrificial animals and their meat was intended not only for gods – people also received a share, not intended for burning on the altar. This procedure can be seen as an echo of archaic beliefs that each slain animal cannot be slaughtered in vain [10; 100]. It was thought improper to slaughter for food an animal, which was used in household, because cattle gave many goods or helped in work.

Besides 'simple' sacrifices there were also 'special' sacrifices. These sacrifices were accompanying soothsaying, taking oaths, signing treaties. They also were held while trying to purify or propitiate oneself. This last type of sacrifice is of special interest for us. Symbolically crimes of a person were transferred to the animal, which redeemed them with its death. This is why the body of slaughtered animal was not burned on an altar, but rather buried in a ground or thrown in a sea.

This sacrifice was not aimed at pleasing gods or heroes. It had one goal: to bring to an end existing conflicts. In this way citizens tried to turn violence from their community, transfer it on another species.

Sacrifice was also important in the struggle to overcome blood feud and vengeance. It is known, that vengeance, even just, leads to another violence, while symbolic sacrifice doesn't. This sacrifice was the way to enclose the circle of violence giving birth to new violence [5; 30-40].

As society grew and developed, religion and ceremonies could no longer be the only institution to stop the violence. Complex social relationships have need of formal institution with power to stop violence and punish the guilty. This institution is a court house. Court appears first in archaic times and in the course of time its role started to grow, while role of religion in resolving matters of conflicts faded.

But while courts grew on behalf of the power of religion there is a paradox. Courts themselves were heavily bound with religious believes. For instance, Athenians believed that Areopag was founded by Athena herself, patroness of Athens. Athenian court is both very rational and very theological.

Areopag, just as sacrifices, was a way to omit violence, and omit vengeance. One did not cancel another. Moreover, verdicts of the court were often followed by religious ritual of sacrifice. But the court pronounced secular and collective verdicts, citizens judged citizens. Their decisions were based on their view on laws, crimes, punishments, and were ought to be unprecedented. The court was arbitral, it did not represent any political or social group – only the polis itself, thus being truly collective institution.

As we see, reflection over violence and ways or restraining it in ancient Athens lies in different spheres. Two main spheres were laws and judicial system and religion. Both of these dimensions are connected and supplement each other.

Period of early classic age, the first half of V century B.C. is of special interest in this context. In this period religious believes are strong enough for violence to be viewed from religious perspective and the secular judicial system is not yet fully formed. It is still bound to theology and cannot be the only system of interpretation of phenomena of violence and its sequences.

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НАСИЛЬСТВО ТА МЕХАНІЗМИ ЙОГО ЗАМІЩЕННЯ У СТАРОДАВНІХ АФІНАХ

Статтю присвячено проблемі насильства у стародавній грецькій культурі, а також способам його тлумачення, розуміння та трансформації. Прослідковано тенецу уявлень про насильство у стародавній Греції, особливості трансформації розуміння насильства у релігійній, військовій і правовій сферах, а також місце цього феномену у межах двох полів, що взаємодоповнюють і

водночас перетікають одне в одне, – теологічного та правового. У статті також розглянуто основні види заміщення насильства у давньогрецьких полісах.

Ключові слова: насильство, Афіни 5 ст. до н.е., античність, стародавня Греція, етос помсти, поліс, право, релігійні уявлення, агон, жертвопринесення.