Chapter 7

From Alkestis to Archidike: Thessalian Attitudes to Death and the Afterlife[*]

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The aim of this chapter is to offer a regional perspective on the issue of Underworld journeys in Antiquity by tracing Thessalian attitudes to Hades from the Classical to the Hellenistic period. What do we know of the beliefs regarding the Underworld in Thessaly, a land where one of the most famous and successful *katabaseis* occurred? Our starting point will be the most famous Thessalian 'round trip' to Hades, that of Alkestis, portrayed through Athenian eyes in Euripides' tragedy and Plato. This will allow us to discuss eschatological beliefs reflected in fifth-century BCE Athenian literary works and address some of the stereotypes about Thessaly, as both are linked to the questions under discussion. We will then turn to Thessaly itself and examine a variety of relevant evidence pertaining to cults of deities linked with passages and human destiny, the gold lamellae from Pherai and Pharsalos, funerary epigrams from the region echoing themes attested in the lamellae or revealing a concern with or a belief in the possibility of a blessed afterlife or for a 'round trip to the Underworld' and last but not least, the evidence from contemporary Thessalian necropoleis. As will be seen, the Thessalian evidence, although of a complex and often disparate nature, is suggestive of a heightened interest in the safe journey to the Underworld or a blessed afterlife.

Thessaly is strategically situated in the Greek peninsula (*Fig. 1*). It was very fertile, commanded an excellent cavalry force, and was famous for the wealth and the luxurious

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lifestyle of its landowning elite families who ruled in an oligarchic manner in the Archaic and Classical periods.[1] Key sites for our discussion are: Pherai (the marital home of Alkestis), the port cities of Iolkos (place of origin of Alkestis), Pagasai and Amphanai on the western mouth of the Pagasetic Gulf which were under the control of Pherai in Classical times, Demetrias, the major port of Thessaly in the Hellenistic period, as well as inland cities, such as Pelinna, Trikke, Larisa, and Pharsalos.[2]

Thessaly in Literary Sources

The 'Hellenic identity' of its people was not under question, but Classical and later – non-Thessalian – literary sources paint Thessaly as a feudal backwater famous for its excessive luxury and all sorts of abuses,[3] a view that has permeated modern scholarship. The accuracy of much of the above has been challenged recently,[4] and this negative view of Thessaly, especially in Athenian sources, has been seen to conform to the models of representation employed for other 'northern' neighbours and/or prompted by the political system in Thessaly and current political affairs.[5]

Yet, for Classical authors, Thessaly was regarded as a 'strange place'.[6] Already in the fifth century BCE, it is presented as the home of the notorious Thessalian witches who prepared powerful magical potions and possessed supernatural powers.[7] In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, performed in 423 BCE, it is Thessalian witches who could bring down and capture the moon from the sky.[8] This trick became a literary topos; it is mentioned as locus communis (ὅπερ φασὶ) in Plato's *Gorgias* in 390 BCE, and was repeated much later in Plutarch, in his narration of the story of the Thessalian astronomer and magician Aglaonike.[9] It is also common in Latin authors such as Pliny, Apuleius and Lucan, who perpetuated the traditional view of Thessaly as a land of magic, the exotic and the strange. In some of these late

[1] Stamatopoulou 2007a.
[2] Decourt, Nielsen and Helly 2004, 691, 695–97, 699–707 and 719.
[3] Stamatopoulou 2007a, 314, n. 33, 327 and nn. 123–34; Wilkins 2000, 79, 97–98 and 287–88; Aston 2012, 258, n. 44, on the only instance of questioning of Thessalian Greekness. Key passages include: Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6.1.3; Athenaios, *Deipnosophists* 11.27.f (*chondros*); 1.28.a (slaves); 1.29.b (soft Thessalian chairs); 2.33.7; 2.47.b (hunger); 3.112.a–b and f *(kollix*-bun); 3. 127b–c (*chondros*); 4.137d (lavish dinners); 10.419 b–e (gluttony); 10.434b–d (large portions of meat); 11.413f (large drinking vessels/toasts); 14.663d–e (*mattye*-cake); Plato, *Meno* 70a–b; *Criton* 53 d–e.
[4] Morgan 2003, 21–24 and 85–105; Stamatopoulou 2007a; Aston 2012 on Thessalian hospitality; Mili 2015, ch. 6.
[5] Stamatopoulou 2007a, 337–38; Stamatopoulou 2007b for Pharsalos; Aston 2012.
[6] Zapheiropoulos 2008.
[7] Cazeaux 1979, 271–74; Phillips 2002, 378–80; Collins 2008, 53; Vanhaegendoren 2008, 169–75; Mili 2015, 286–90.
[8] Aristophanes, *Clouds* 749–50.
[9] Plato, *Gorgias* 513a; Plutarch, *On the Decline of the Oracles* 416e–f.

traditions, the frightful Thessalian magicians are singled out for their blood thirst and are credited with the ability to transcend the borders between the living and the dead.[10]

Turning to Athenian fifth-century tragic poets, it is evident that Thessalian myth is prominent in their work: there are at least eighty references to members of its legendary royal *oikoi*: of Phthia (Peleus and Achilles), Iolkos (Jason and Pelias), Pherai (Admetos), Phylake (Protesilaos, another Thessalian hero with a successful, if brief, *anodos* from the Underworld),[11] not to mention the Lapiths, Ixion, Peirithous and, last but not least, the tragic end of Herakles near its southern border, at Herakleia on Trachis in the *Trachiniae*.[12] Equally, one of the Thessalian deities par excellence, the Pheraean En(n)odia, appears in Attic texts as being in charge of the honours paid to the dead along with Hades/Plouto; she is a goddess of crossroads and ghosts and, as daughter of Demeter overseeing nocturnal patrols, she was also assimilated to Hekate.[13]

In these narratives, Thessaly is also portrayed as a strange and wild place, as are its heroes, whose actions often went beyond the norms of society. Ixion, for example, king of the Lapiths, killed his father-in-law and tried to sleep with Hera, and was guilty of a terrible sacrilege – kin-murder and violation of "hospitality rites (*xenia*)" – he was bound by Zeus to a burning solar wheel for all eternity.[14] In addition to those heroic actors, Thessalian people were singled out for their ability to play tricks and perform stratagems. Euripides, for example, makes reference to the "Thessalian crafty tricks (*Thessalōn sophisma*)" and "Thessalian traps (*Thessalōn stochasmata*)", while considering their acts "untrustworthy (*apista*)".[15] This negative view of Thessaly in the eyes of Classical Athenians may be partly explained by the following reasons: the geographical position of Thessaly in the northern 'borders' of the Greek world; the medism of Thessaly;[16] the Athenian dependence on the Thessalian cavalry until the mid-fifth century BCE and the Thessalians' shifting alliances (with Athens, Sparta and later Macedonia), which cost the Athenians dearly at the Battle of

[10] Pliny, *Natural History* 30.7; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6. 438–506 and 603–80; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.21–30. Also: Cazeaux 1979, 265–70; Phillips 2002, 381–84; Ogden 2002, 121–24; Frangoulidis 2008, 13–45; Spaeth 2014; Mili 2015, 286.

[11] In Euripides' *Protesilaos*, surviving only in a few fragments: Collard and Crop 2008, vol. 2, 106–17; Öhrman 2009, 47–48.

[12] Zapheiropoulos 2008, 153 and n. 2.

[13] Sophocles, *Antigone* 1199–201; Euripides, *Helen* 569–70; idem, *Ion* 1048–51. For the assimilation of En(n)odia to Hekate, Sophocles, *Rhizotomoi*, fr. 532 Radt; also, *Orphic Hymn to Hekate* v. 1; cf. Hesychios, *s.v.* Φεραία Schmidt; cf. Chrysostomou 1998, 87–88, 112–18 and 187.

[14] Aeschylus, *Ixion* fr. 89–93 Radt 1985; *Perrhebides* 300 Radt; Euripides, *Ixion*, fr. 490 Nauck; Sophocles, *Ixion* 145–46 Dios; also, in Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 441, 717–18; Euripides, *Herakl*es 1297–98. Also, Belfiore 2000, 125, 127 and 169; Zapheiropoulos 2008, 156–57 and n. 9.

[15] Euripides, *Phoinissae* 1407–8; *Bacchae* 1204–7; fr. 426.

[16] Westlake 1936, 12–24; Helly 1995, 114–15 and 223–26; Keaveney 1995, 30–38.

Tanagra;[17] the extravagant lifestyle of the Thessalian elites, some of whom interacted with Athenians as *xenoi* or had resided in the city during the mid to late fifth century.[18]

Euripides, in his *Medea*, staged in 431 BCE, adheres to this tradition of Thessaly as a locus of magic, by giving the great daughter of Helios and Hekate a Thessalian home, Iolkos.[19] In the play, magical potions that provoked lethal acts are crucial for the regeneration of the Thessalian King Pelias which led to his murder and the murder of her children.[20] We should note here that Mount Pelion, near Iolkos, was (and still is) famous for its plants and was characterized as "one of the most productive places of medicinal plants (*pharmakodestatos topos*)" in Greece.[21] It is possible that Euripides had first-hand knowledge of the region, since in his biographies prefixed to the play in some medieval manuscripts it is stated that, on his way to Macedonia in 408 BCE, he stopped in Magnesia where he was granted the honours of *proxenia* and *ateleia*.[22] Although the validity of many elements of his biography has been seriously questioned and many details are considered anecdotal, a familiarity with the region, either through visit, *xenia* or patronage is possible, especially given the localization elements in at least two of his tragedies.[23]

Alkestis' Round Trip

Whereas Medea's acts in Thessaly link the region with the practice of leathal magic tricks, this was definitely not the case with Euripides' narrative of one of the best known mythical *katabaseis* to the realm of the dead – that of Alkestis, an Iolkian princess who became Pheraean queen.[24] The story takes place at Pherai, a leading Thessalian city of the Classical period, which at the time of the play, the late fifth century BCE, controlled the biggest

[17] Spence 2010 on the importance of the Thessalian cavalry as a factor for Athenian relations with Thessaly. For the diplomatic relations and alliances between Athens and the Thessalians: Helly 1995, 105; Sprawski 1999, 25–31; Stamatopoulou 2007a, 337–39; Aston 2012, esp. 261–65.
[18] Stamatopoulou 2007b, 213–20 for Pharsalians.
[19] Euripides, *Medea* 7–8. Mastronarde 2010, 30, 253 and 298.
[20] Euripides, *Medea* 9–10, 792–93. Mastronarde 2010, 30, 253 and 298.
[21] Theophrastos, *Enquiry into Plants* 9.15.4; Pliny, *Natural History* 25.53 for the dictamon from Pelion.
[22] *Euripides' Vita* 1; Lefkowitz 1979, 189–90; Vahtikari 2014, 87, n. 48 (with earlier bibliography).
[23] For the 'Thessalian' element in Euripides' tragedies: Taplin 1999, 41–44; Allan 2000, 149–60; Vahtikari 2014, 52–53, 130–32 (with relation to *Alkestis*); cf. Parker 2007, 217. Contra Scullion 2003 who refutes the presence of Euripides in the north, Macedonia in particular.
[24] Euripides, *Alkestis* 260–61. In a way, the Euripidaean *Alkestis* envelops in myth a narration that symbolizes the union between the port and the hinterland; she was the legendary princess of Iolkos married to King Admetos of Pherai characterized by Euripides as "king of the Thessalians (*Thessalon anax*)" (510). For the *katabasis* of Alkestis, see Segal 1993, 51–88; Foley 2001, 303–31; Slater 2013, 67–73; Markantonatos 2013, 131–60; also Foley 2001, 303–31; Mikellidou 2015, 329–52. We should note here that the other successful *anodos* of a Thessalian hero, that of Protesilaos, also narrated by Euripides, was achieved with the intervention of Poseidon: see above n. 11 and also Johnston 1999, 99–100.

Thessalian port and the port cities of Iolkos and Pagasai.[25] Given the numerous localization elements in his *Alkestis* and *Andromache*, it is likely that Euripides, staging in front of Athenian eyes questions of human death and eschatology, was aware of Thessalian traditions. The play's story is well known: Apollo convinces Thanatos to let his impeccable host, King Admetos of Pherai, live, on condition that he find someone else to die instead. Alkestis, his wife, offers willingly to take his place, and in the end Herakles, overpowering Thanatos, fetches her back from the tomb to the Pheraean palace.[26]

The Thessalians' interaction with Hades is presented in this play as a result of divine – and not human – deception: it is Apollo who rescues Admetos from death "by tricking the Fates".[27] Before Alkestis' death, the chorus flirts with the futile hope of Asklepios' intervention, who had played a vital role in successful human round trips to Hades: "for he used to raise the dead".[28] But, as Euripides narrates, Asklepios, a hero with a strong Thessalian pedigree, had already been killed by Zeus. Hence, the chorus loses hope: "But now what hope can I still embrace that she will live?"[29]

Similarly, Admetos himself expresses wish that he could descend into Hades as a new Orpheus: "If I had the voice and music of Orpheus […] I would have gone […] and charmed Persephone and Hades with songs in order to bring Alkestis back to the sunlight alive".[30] In the end, Alkestis' *anodos* is achieved with the intervention of Herakles,[31] the Greek divine hero par excellence and one of the key heroes of Pherai, and someone who has experience of round trips to Hades.[32] As Herakles tells Admetos, Alkestis' *anodos* is not a product of Thessalian witchcraft committed by a human "raiser of souls (*psychagōgos*)",[33] but a result of his heroic deed (e.g. struggle with Thanatos by the tomb). At the same time, the tragic poet throughout the play reminds his audience of human destiny: "Know that death is a debt we all must pay" and "it is not possible for the dead to come back to the light",[34] views that echo

[25] Béquignon 1937; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 1994; Arachoviti 2000; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou and Arachoviti 2006; See also Decourt, Nielsen and Helly 2004, 704; Helly 2006, 146–47.
[26] Mastronarde 2010, 15–21; Slater 2013, 31–66.
[27] Euripides, *Alkestis* 11–12: παιδὸς Φέρητος, ὃν θανεῖν, Μοίρας δολώ σας.
[28] Euripides, *Alkestis* 126.
[29] Euripides, *Alkestis* 130.
[30] Euripides, *Alkestis* 357, 360 and 362.
[31] Euripides, *Alkestis* 1126–28; Buxton 2013, 210–13.
[32] Herakles' *katabasis* to Hades: Euripides, *Herakles;* Mikellidou 2015, 332–37 sees this *katabasis* as proof of heroism. See also the contribution by Verbanck-Piérard in this volume.
[33] Euripides, *Alkestis* 1126–28; Zapheiropoulos 2008, 156.
[34] Euripides, *Alkestis* 419; 1075.

contemporary ideas about the afterlife, as attested in literary testimonia and in contemporary epigrams.[35]

Why is Alkestis exalted in this manner? The narration of her noble deed – to die willingly in place of her husband – is not merely ascribed to her elevated social status as a noble Thessalian queen.[36] She is repeatedly characterized as "noble (*aristē*)" and is praised for her moral integrity: she is "virtuous" (*agathē* and *esthlē*), "brave" (*gennaia*) and "courageous" (*schetlia tolmēs*), "glorious" (*eukleēs*), and "wise" (*sōphrōn*).[37] Facing the imminent death of this exemplary Pheraean princess, the chorus expresses the wish that "Hermes Chthonios and Hades will receive her kindly and she will be seated next to Persephone".[38] In that sense, this *aristē* woman would posthumously "win a place of privilege in the Underworld", and become a "blessed spirit" (*makaira daimōn*).[39] Euripides' Alkestis becomes an archetypal figure, a virtuous woman who returns to light through her excellent character and with the aid of a hero's intervention. The play ends with a hopeful idea about human death, leaving open the possibility of an unexpected divine intervention in human affairs: "What men expect is not brought to pass, but a god finds a way to achieve the unexpected".[40]

Later, in Plato, following the same Euripidean thread, Alkestis' sacrifice and *anodos* are seen as an example of the sacrifices that Eros can inspire.[41] Plato argues that Alkestis' deed was

> judged so noble by gods as well as men that, although among all the many doers of noble deeds they are few and soon counted to whom the gods have granted the privilege of "having their souls sent up again from Hades" (ἐξ Ἅιδου ἀνεῖναι πάλιν τὴν ψυχήν), hers they thus restored in admiration of her act.[42]

Plato, like Euripides, argues that a round trip to Hades is possible, but he is concerned with the "human soul" (*psyche*), leaving aside the corporal dimension of Alkestis' *anodos*. This tallies with his theories involving the immortality of the soul, and the related issues of the

[35] Mili 2015, 278–79, stresses the difference between Thessalian Archaic and Classical epigrams and the Hellenistic ones; in the former there is no interest in the afterlife.
[36] Euripides, *Alkestis* 1002. See: Johnston 1999, 153; Rehm 1994, 84–89, esp. 89.
[37] Euripides, *Alkestis* 83, 150–52, 235, 418, 442, 615, 624, 741–42, 899 and 1083.
[38] Euripides, *Alkestis* 743–46.
[39] Euripides, *Alkestis* 1003. Johnston 1999, 153 and n. 85 where she envisages that Alkestis will receive hero cult.
[40] Euripides, *Alkestis* 1018.
[41] Plato, *Symposium* 179b. That the references to Alkestis in Plato's *Symposium* are allusions to Euripides' play rather than to some other version of the myth, is argued in Garner 1990, 64–78; Sansone 1996, 49–51 and esp. 63. For the influence of Plato from contemporary theatrical plays and especially Euripidean tragedies, see Sansone 1996, 35–67, esp. 41.
[42] Plato, *Symposium* 179c (trans. Lamb 1925).

eternal judgment performed by the three Underworld Judges, and the metempsychosis of the exemplary human souls.[43] Plato's views greatly influenced the eschatological beliefs of the Macedonian court and subsequently the Hellenistic world, while echoes of them appear on epigrams.[44]

As scholars have pointed out, the Athenian fifth-century narrative of Thessalian Alkestis' mythical round trip to Hades is one of the many attestations of changes in Athenian eschatological beliefs in the late Archaic and early Classical period. Charon and Hermes become benevolent and reassuring figures who aid the journey of the dead to the Underworld,[45] and stories such as Alkestis' and Protesilaos' or Asklepios' imply that there may have existed a "fascination with the possibility that death was not final".[46]

The Evidence from Thessaly: Cults

Having presented the Athenian view of Thessaly and a 'Thessalian' (Alkestis) mythical round trip to Hades, we should now turn to Thessaly itself, and examine what the contemporary archaeological and epigraphic evidence from the region can reveal about Thessalian responses to death or possible afterlife journeys. As mentioned above, Thessaly is often portrayed as a 'land of magic'. Considering the fame of Thessaly as a locus of magic and the plethora of non-Thessalian references to witchcraft, the near absence of pertinent finds from the region is astounding, especially given how common these are in other parts of the Graeco-Roman world.[47] Contrary to the scarcity of evidence pertaining to magic, cults to divinities associated with major passages, among them passages to the Underworld, seem to have been prominent in the region. It is perhaps significant that many such cults were located at Pherai itself.[48]

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[43] On the immortality of the soul: Plato, *Phaedrus* 245c; *Phaedo* 10e, 69e–70a, 73a, 95d, 106b; *Republic* 608d.; *Meno* 81c; *Laws* 10, 609a. On the wandering of the soul and the eternal judgment, see Plato, *Phaedo* 72–77 and 80e–84c; *Phaedrus* 248d–e; *Republic* 10, 614a–621d. Also: Bernabé 2007, 25–44; Edmonds 2004, 159–220; Edmonds 2015, 551–65; Bussanich 2013, 243–76. For a survey on Greek concepts of the soul: Bremmer 2002, 1–40; Reyser 2011.

[44] Plato, *Phaedo* 107d–114d; *Rep*. 614b–621d; *Gorgias* 523a–527a; earlier, in Pindar, *Olympian* 2.57–60; Edmonds 2004, 56, 148, 197; Pender 2012, 199–234.

[45] Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, esp. 304–20 (Alkestis) and 339.

[46] Johnston 1999, 100 and n. 42 where she also discusses the Dioskouroi. The myth of Alkestis is not common on Attic painted pottery. The known vases date to the late 6th–early 5th c.; Alkestis' *anodos* is probably depicted on a black-figure amphora by the Swing Painter in the Louvre, F60 (Beazley Archive database 301554); another black-figure amphora of late Archaic date, by the Three Line Group, depicts the wedding of Admetos and Alkestis (Beazley Archive database 44120).

[47] Faraone and Obbink 1991; Gager 1999; Collins 2008, 64–103. An, allegedly, silver curse tablet was retrieved among other finds of the Roman period from the ancient theatre of Phthiotic Thebes: Adrymi-Sismani 2012, 245. The absence of archaeological testimonia for magic does not preclude that there was specialization in the use of 'herbs' (*pharmaka*) for medicinal and other purposes.

[48] Chysostomou 1998, passim.

It is appropriate to start with En(n)odia, a Thessalian goddess, of possibly Pheraean origin.[49] She was represented on reliefs and Pheraean coins standing or on horseback, with one or two torches, accompanied by her favourite animal attributes, a dog or horse.[50] Civic decrees were erected in her major sanctuary just outside the city walls, in the periphery of the northern cemetery, which also hosted a cult of Zeus Thaulios/Aphrios (*Fig. 2*).[51] A goddess that protects pathways and crossroads, En(n)odia is also in the Athenian tragedians' work and especially in later sources a goddess of the Underworld, worshipped in cemeteries, and related to ghosts and witchcraft.[52] In the Hellenistic period, En(n)odia was assimilated in Demetrias with Artemis En(n)odia and En(n)odia Hekate.[53] Hekate is well known in Greek literary tradition for her round trips to Hades and her involvement with magic.[54]

Herakles, responsible for Alkestis' *anodos* and safe passage back to the palace of Pherai, was venerated widely in Thessaly, which is hardly surprising if one considers that many leading families in the region claimed Heraclid descent.[55] At Pherai, the evidence pertaining to his cult is plentiful, dating back to the late seventh century BCE. Sanctuaries dedicated to him existed both in the city near the acropolis and in its *chōra*, to the southeast of the city, near the border of the Pheraean territory and adjacent to the road leading to Pagasai and the harbour.[56]

Alongside cults to divinities associated with major passages, the Thessalian sacred space, Pherai in particular, included cults with a clear metaphysical element, for example that of Dioskouroi. The twin brothers, famous for their *katasterismos* that transformed them posthumously into constellations in the sky, had two sanctuaries at Pherai; their cult is attested

[49] Chrysostomou 1998, esp. 25–90; Mili 2015, 147–60 (with earlier bibliography).
[50] Chrysostomou 1998, 145–46, Figs. 12:4, 5, 7 and 10 (Pheraean coins) and 152–53 (votive relief from Krannon); Heinz 1998, 270.
[51] Béquignon 1937, 29ff; Chrysostomou 1998, 25–43; Archoviti, Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou and Tsigara 2012; Mili 2015, 30–31, 35, 112–13, 158 and 336–38.
[52] For example, Polyaenus, *Stratagems* 8.43. See Kraus 1960, 77–83; Helly 2010a; Zografou 2010, 114–15.
[53] En(n)odia in Demetrias: Chrysostomou 1998, 187–230; Batziou-Efstathiou 2002, 30–33; Kravaritou 2011, 117 and Table 2 (11–12 and 37); Kravaritou 2016, 139–41; Stamatopoulou 2014, 215, 218 and 228–32. Mili 2015, 207 explains the assimilation of Artemis with En(n)odia in Demetrias as indicative of cult practiced by non-local worshippers.
[54] Zografou 2010, 68–70; Zografou 2015; Johnston 1999, 202–15 and 238–49; Collins 2008, 64–103; Dickie 2007, 359.
[55] On the Heraclid descent of the Aleuads of Larisa: Stamatopoulou 2007a focusing on Pindar's *Pythian Ode* 10; Intzesiloglou 2002 for the myth of Aiatos in relation to the cult by the Late Bronze Age tholos tomb at Georgiko; see also Stamatopoulou 2016, 193–95.
[56] Kakavogiannis 1978, 318–24; Mili 2015, 124. For the cult of Herakles near the church of Ag. Charalambos: Arvanitopoulos 1907, 158–60. In the newly investigated sanctuary at Spartia/Latomio, among the dedications were an inscribed bronze omphalos phiale, fragments of Archaic marble statuary as well as deposits containing burnt animal bones and numerous metal votives, esp. weapons, phialai, obeloi, jewellery as well as pottery of the 7th and 6th c. BCE: Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 1999, 405; Stamelou and Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2010. See also the early epigraphic attestation of a cult of Herakles at Skotoussa (6th c. BCE): *SEG* 25, 1971, 661; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2000, 101–5.

in the city at least from the fourth century BCE.[57] One of their sanctuaries was located in the Pheraean chora and is referred to as the *Dioskoureion* in Demosthenes.[58] Outside Pherai, the cult of the Dioskouroi is known from neighbouring Larisa, in the late third century BCE.[59]

Also important in the sacred landscape of Thessaly were cults of divinities associated with human destiny, such as the Moirai and/or Helios. Both were venerated at Pherai, as is attested by two votive inscriptions addressed to the Moirai Patroai, dated to the early third century BCE and found in the area of the northern cemetery of the city,[60] and to Helios.[61] The cults of the Moirai and Helios are also attested epigraphically at Atrax (where Helios was worshipped together with all the "ancestral gods and goddesses"), Krannon and later Metropolis, and in the recently discovered inscription from the north-eastern border of the eastern Thessalian plain, where the Moira(i?) and Helios received joint cult.[62] Both the Moirai and Helios were closely linked with human fate and death. Literary testimonia stress that the Moirai controlled the thread of life, already from the moment of birth.[63] In Euripides' *Alkestis*, Apollo saves Admetos from his destined death by "tricking them" (ll. 12 and 33: *Moiras dolōsas*), while in the early second century BCE funerary epigram of Hediste from Demetrias, who died prematurely during childbirth along with her child, the terrible loss is again attributed to the Fates: "The *Moirai* spun on their spindles for Hediste their painful thread, when the bride went to meet the pains of labour".[64] Similarly, the passage to death is symbolically referred to as a passage from sunlight to darkness, for example in *Alkestis* line18, where Apollo states that by choosing to die for her husband she will no longer see the light, a motif that is very common in epigrams.[65] The presence of the cults of the Moirai and Helios in Thessaly implies a general interest in the moment when human destiny meets death, and therefore new challenges. It is perhaps relevant that in Thessaly there existed a *temenos*

[57] Béquignon 1937, 62 and 78; Heinz 1998; 86 and 340–42, cat. nos. 301–3; Stamatopoulou 2013, 48 for a brief mention of the newly discovered votive relief from Velestino; Mili 2015, 173.
[58] Demosthenes 19.158; Chrysostomou 1983, 95–106; Pikoulas 2010 refutes Chrysostomou's suggestion about the location of the pandocheion and the Dioskoureion**.**
[59] *SEG* 35, 1985, 605; Heinz 1998, 86 and 342–43, cat. nos. 304–5.
[60] Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 1987, 271; Rakatsanis and Tziafalias 1997, 48; *SEG* 43, 1993, 305 (3rd c. BCE); Heinz 1998, 319, cat. no. 263, fig. 44.
[61] Hellenistic votive stele to Helios: Béquignon 1937, 89, no. 56; Heinz 1998, 77 and 312, cat. no. 250.
[62] Atrax: votive stele to "Helios, first king, and All Gods Patrooi and Goddesses": *SEG* 34, 1984, 492 (end of 3rd c. BCE); Rakatsanis and Tziafalias 1997, 72, fig. 50; Heinz 1998, 312–13, cat. no. 251, fig. 168; also, Tziafalias et al. 2016, 77 and 150. Krannon, *IG* IX:2 464 (2nd c. BCE); Heinz 1998, 312–13, cat. no. 251, fig. 168. Metropolis, *IG* IX:2 282 (2nd c. BCE); Heinz 1998, 319–20, cat. no. 264, fig. 103. Marmarini inscription: Decourt and Tziafalias 2012, 463–65; Decourt and Tziafalias 2015; Parker and Scullion 2016, 209–66.
[63] Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2011, 103–9; Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2015, 42–43; cf. Pironti 2009, 13–27.
[64] Hediste stele (early 2nd c. BCE): Arvanitopoulos 1909, no. 1, 215–19; Arvanitopoulos 1928, 147–49; Peek 1955, no. 1606; Cairon 2009, 260–62; Saloway 2012, 251–55, esp. 254, for the role of the Fates. Moirai in other Thessalian epigrams: *SEG* 26 1976–77, 645. *IG* IX:2 656 and 640. See also Plato, *Republic* 617c.
[65] For a Thessalian example see: *IG* IX:2 429, l. 4: πάλιν ἦλθες ἂν εἰς φῶ[ς].

closely associated with the Underworld divinities, that of Plouton and Persephone in Perrhaibia (near the spring Mati), which according to some scholars marked one of the entrances to the Underworld.[66]

Dionysos, who in mystery cults of the late Classical and Hellenistic periods mediated between Persephone and the initiates, was worshipped widely at Pherai and his cult is attested in numerous ways, including the famous gold lamellae, which date to the late fourth and early third centuries BCE,[67] and reveal the concern both for the journey and the life beyond. The first lamella, from the southern cemetery of the city, declares the mystic passwords that most likely relate to initiation.[68] In the second one (*Fig. 3*), from Magoula Mati in the northern cemetery of the city, which mentions Demeter Chthonia and Oreia Meter, the deceased claims a place among the *thiasoi* of the initiates in the Underworld, not due to virtuous deeds (like Alkestis) but by virtue of his ritual acts.[69]

Gold lamellae are known from many areas of the Greek world, in particular South Italy, Thessaly, Crete and Macedonia.[70] What characterizes the Thessalian lamellae is their great variety in form, text and divinities.[71] Besides the Pheraean examples, another four lamellae are known from the region: the Pharsalos and Getty ones contain instructions to the deceased in order to find his way in the Underworld, by declaring himself to be the son of the earth and starry heaven.[72] On the Pelinna ivy leaves (*Fig. 4*), found in the tomb of a woman interred with a neonate, Bacchios figures prominently.[73] He is the mediating power arguing for a triple *makarismos* of the deceased: "Now you have died and now you have been born, thrice blessed one (*trisolbie*), on this very day. Say to Persephone that Bacchios himself freed you (*Bakchios autos eluse*)".[74]

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[66] Lucas 2002, 107–24; Helly 2010b, 98, n. 20; Mili 2015, 283, n. 129. See also the paper by Friese in this volume.

[67] Dionysos' cult at Pherai: Chrysostomou 1994, 113–49.

[68] *SEG* 45, 1995, 646; *OF* 493 (=L 13) (Pherai, 350–300 BCE); Edmonds 2011, 37; Graf and Johnston 2013, 38–39, no. 27: "Passwords: Man-and-child-thyrsos. Man-and-child-thyrsos. Brimo, Brimo. Enter the sacred meadow. For the initiate is redeemed. GAPEDON".

[69] Parker and Stamatopoulou 2004 [2007], 1–32; *Orph. Fr.* 493A (= L13a) (Pherai, late 4th/early 3rd c. BCE); Graf and Johnston 2013, 38–39, no. 28: "Send me to the *thiasoi* of the initiates. I have (seen) / I possess the rites/tokens/the initiations […] of Demeter Chthonia and of the Mountain Mother". See also the contribution by Scullion in this volume.

[70] Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 2–8; Tsifopoulos 2010; Edmonds 2011, 15–50; Graf and Johnston 2013, 1–49.

[71] Parker and Stamatopoulou 2004 [2007], 18–23 for a discussion of the context and features of the leaves. Also Tsifopoulos 2010, esp. 255–84, for the context of all known leaves.

[72] Decourt 1995, 128, no. 115; *Orph. Fr.* 477 (=L 4) (Pharsalos, 350–300 BCE). *Orph. Fr.* 484 (=L 6) (Unknown location in Thessaly, middle 4th c. BCE): Graf and Johnston 2013, 34–35, no. 25 and 40–41, no. 29.

[73] Tsantsanoglou and Parasoglou 1987, 3–16; *Orph. Fr.* 485–486 (=L 7a–b) (Pelinna, late 4th/early 3rd c. BCE).

[74] *Orph. Fr.* 485–486 (=L 7a–b) ll. 1–2 (translation Graf and Johnston 2013, 36–37, no. 26 a,b.). See also the contributions by Scullion and Herrero de Jáuregui in this volume.

It is a topos in modern scholarship that the texts of those lamellae, confined to private contexts, express positive emotions towards death and the passage to the afterlife; they were the reserve of the pious devotees who had chosen to undergo a private initiation during their lifetime.[75]

The Evidence from Thessaly: Funerary Epigrams

Positive emotions towards death and the afterlife can be also detected in more public contexts, for example funerary epigrams.[76] Thus, it has been tentatively suggested by specialists in 'Orphic' religion and funerary epigrams that it is possible to discern hidden 'Orphic' elements in some epigrams of the late Classical and Hellenistic eras.[77] Wypustek has recently refuted this and argued that the texts betraying an Orphic and Pythagorean influence are rare and almost impossible to identify.[78]

Concerning Hellenistic Thessalian funerary epigrams, alongside the wide spectrum of negative emotions, such as sadness, grief and pain for the cut of someone's thread of life or the painful loss of beloved ones, and fear toward the divine powers which provoked it, there is also a parallel display of positive emotions – pride but also hope – that eventually marks the passage from life to death. Here, as will be shown below, death is also connected to joy, and even anticipation for the transport of the soul to the Underworld, a hope for immortality and a potential, though highly improbable, return of virtuous devotees to life.

For example, in an early third-century epigram from Pherai, the deceased Lykophron claims: "I, Lykophron, the son of Philiskos, seem (*doxei*) sprung from the root of great Zeus, but in truth (*aletheiai*) am from the immortal fire; and I live among the heavenly stars uplifted by my father; but the body born of my mother occupies mother-earth".[79] Avagianou rightly pointed out a series of syntactic and semantic oppositions that find parallels in Pre-Socratic texts, the commentary of the Derveni papyrus and the 'Bacchic-Orphic' texts.[80] In particular, she has drawn parallels between the couplets *doxa-alētheiai* (l. 2), *sōma-psychē* (ll. 3–4) of the epigram and the graffiti of the Olbia bone tablets. She has also argued that the semantics

[75] Riedweg 2011, 219–56; Edmonds 2004, 200–1; Graf and Johnston 2013, 94–136; Bremmer 2014, 55–80; Chaniotis 2012a, 97.
[76] Tsagalis 2008, 39, 86 and 135–59; Wypustek 2013, 5–35, 48–52, 71–73, 78–79, 90 and 125.
[77] Graf 1985, 130, n. 75; Hughes 1999, 171; Bernabé 2004–2007, no. 466; Tsagalis 2008, 125–30 and 314; Cairon 2009, 225 and 263–64; Herrero de Jáuregui 2010, 69–70; cf. Chaniotis 2013, 256.
[78] Wypustek 2013, 74, 109 and 112; see also for the Macedonian epigrams Kalaitzi 2016a, 109 esp. n. 87; ead. 2016b, 508-9.
[79] Peek 1974, no 25; *SEG* 28, 1978, 528; Theocharis 1967, 297, fig. 196; Merkelbach 1973, 156; Avagianou 2002a, 75 (translation); Mili 2015, 276.
[80] Avagianou 2002a, 76–78.

of the expressions "I live among the heavenly stars" (l. 3) and "the body born of my mother occupies mother-earth" (l. 4) recall or evoke the famous password "I am a son of the earth and the starry heaven", used by the 'Bacchic-Orphic' initiates in order to justify before the guardians of the Underworld their claim upon a favoured place in the "sacred meadows".[81] Avagianou thus concluded that Lykophron was probably a heroized initiate in the local 'Bacchic-Orphic' mysteries.[82] We must bear in mind however that none of the texts of the Pherai tablets contain a dialogue with the famous phrase of earthly-astral eschatology, as the Pharsalos lamella does.[83] When there is dialogue between the deceased and the powers of the Underworld, the key to the desired afterlife rests on initiation rites, including ritual passwords, and not on claims of shared genealogy as it happens in Lykophron's case.[84] Moreover, the expression of dualistic eschatological ideas, where the sky is often the residence of the soul and the body stays under the earth, constitutes one of the topoi of late Classical and Hellenistic epigrams: that of astral immortality.[85] This literary motif – astral immortality – has yet to be convincingly related to 'Orphic' or 'Bacchic-Orphic' practices and beliefs.

Furthermore, as far as the opposition soul-body in Thessalian epigrams is concerned,[86] this is stated for example in the fourth-century BCE epigram of Sosikrates from Gonnoi which proclaims that his "tomb is enveloped in a mound of earth while his soul is wandering, after having joined the aetherial order".[87] The epigram bears witness to the belief in a posthumous aetherial abode of the soul, another topos in Hellenistic epigrams, attested since the fifth century BCE.[88]

Moving to Thessalian epigrams that include direct references to the Underworld, we observe that a positive attitude towards the afterlife is expressed in the third century BCE epigram for Corinthian Agathokles, from Demetrias.[89] The text invites Persephone to receive a deceased who "descends" to her (*pros se katerchomenon*) and settle him in the "meadow of the pious" (*eusebeōn leimōna*), a rare expression in metrical epitaphs. The virtues of the

[81] Avagianou 2002a, 82–88. On the 'Orphic' password, Edmonds 2004, 64–82; Benz 2011, 102–19.
[82] Avagianou 2002a, 88–89.
[83] Decourt 1995, 128, no. 115; *Orph. Fr.* 477 (=L 4) (Pharsalos, 350–300 BCE).
[84] On Lykophron's genealogy, see Avagianou 2002a, 77–79; Wypustek 2013, 45–47.
[85] See for example, *IG* XII:8 609, ll. 3–4 (Thasos): ψυχὴ δ' ἀθανάτω[ν] βουλαῖς [ἐπ]ι[δ]ή{ο}μιός {ἐπιδήμιός} ἐστιν ἄστροις; *IG* XII:7 123, l. 6 (Amorgos), ἀστὴρ γὰρ γενόμην θεῖος ἀκρεσπέριος; Wypustek 2013, 48–53. For the connection between the human soul and heaven in literature from the early Hellenistic period onwards, see Burkert 1972, 360.
[86] On the opposition body-soul: Tsagalis 2008, 121–27.
[87] *SEG* 38, 1988, 440.
[88] See for example the funerary epigram from Kerameikos (Peek 1955, 8–9) which commemorates the loss as well as the virtues of the Athenian soldiers at the battle of Poteidaia in 432/1 BCE, which has been used as evidence of the influence from Pre-Socratic philosophical ideas, also present in the work of tragic poets, such as Euripides, see Mihai 2010, 553–82.
[89] Arvanitopoulos 1909, 442, no. 194, ll. 1–3; also, Peek 1955, 1572; Cairon 2009, 70 and 226; Mili 2015, 275.

deceased are praised: he was a pious man, a frontrunner in kindness and was inhabited by a soul that was "true" (*alēthēs*), "pure" (*kathara*) and "just" (*dikaiē*).[90] Chaniotis has recently noted that the appraisal of the virtues of the deceased – piety, purity and justice – reflects the idea that in order to join the "Blessed" (*eusebeis*) in the Underworld one needs more than just to perform certain rituals (e.g. purification or initiation); he/she must also have exhibited a moral conduct during his lifetime.[91] Cairon has linked this text with 'Bacchic-Orphic' ideas, mainly because of the expression "meadow of the pious", which is rarely attested in epigrams.[92] It should be emphasized that the texts of the 'Bacchic-Orphic' gold lamellae from Pherai and Thurii, where there is mention of the "meadows", include a semantic differentiation: "Meadows of the Sacred" (*hierōn leimōna*) instead of the "meadow of the pious" (*eusebeōn leimona*) of the epigram.[93] In a slightly later epigram for Ammonios, also from Demetrias, the moral conduct of the deceased (focusing on his *eusebeia*) is again assessed in front of Persephone; he has travelled the "way of no return" (*adiaulon hodon*).[94]

A contemporary epigram from Demetrias, dated to c. 217 BCE, introduces the theme of the eternal judgment, performed by the three Underworld judges. The text mentions only Minos who "has descended" (*katēgage*) the soul of Antigenes to the "Islands of the Blessed" (μακάρων νήσους).[95] Once again the favourable reception to the Underworld is due to the conduct of the deceased on the battlefield. Antigenes defended his country, the corps of the "ephebes" (l. 10. τὸν ἡβητὴν σώιζων λόχον) and his ancestral cults (l. 11: Zeus, which is an allusion to the poliadic cult of Zeus Akraios in Demetrias) with valour.[96] In line 13, it is stated that his body was covered by the earth of (Phthiotic) Thebes (e.g. the battlefield), a clear allusion to the contemporary belief of the body-soul separation, since if his body rested at Thebes it was his soul that was received in the Isles of the Blessed.

Apparently, the "Islands of the Blessed" were not reserved exclusively for virtuous male devotees. An epigram dated to end of the third century BCE from Demetrias, for the Cretan Archidike (*Fig. 5*)**,** contains an appeal to the Judges of the Underworld (ll. 1–3):

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[90] Arvanitopoulos 1909, 442, no. 194, ll. 3–4.
[91] Chaniotis 2000, 169–70 ; Chaniotis 2012b, 123–39; Chaniotis 2013, 256; Bernabé 2012, 18–19.
[92] Cairon 2009, 225; Chaniotis 2013, 256.
[93] On 'sacred meadows' in the gold tablets, see *SEG* 45, 1995, 646, l. 4; *Orph. Fr.* 493 (=L 13) (Pherai, 350–300 BCE). *Orph. Fr.* 487 (=L 8) (Thurii 1, 4th c. BCE). For the meadows as the destination of the soul in the Underworld: Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 174–77.
[94] Arvanitopoulou 1934–1940, 28, no. 3, l. 7, figs. 7–9; Peek 1960, no. 210; Mili 2015, 275.
[95] Arvanitopoulos 1909, 128, no. 10, l. 2; also, Cairon 2009, 233–38, no. 74; Boehm 2015, with whose conclusions regarding Alexander of Pherai we do not agree. For the "Islands of the Blessed" on epigrams of those considered as heroes: Wypustek 2013, 6–28, 114, 182–85, esp. 88–89 and 154–55.
[96] Arvanitopoulos 1909, 128, no. 10, ll. 3–5, 9–13.

εἰ κέκρικας χρηστήν, Ῥαδάμανθυ, γυναῖκα καὶ ἄλλην,
ἢ Μίνως, καὶ τήνδε, οὖσαν Ἀριστομάχου
κούρην· εἰς μακάρων νήσους ἄγετ'· εὐσεβίαν γὰρ
ἤσκει καὶ σύνεδρον τῆσδε δικαιοσύνην.
ἣν Τύλισος μὲν ἔθρεψε, πόλις Κρῆσσα, ἥδε δὲ γαῖα
ἀμφέπει ἀθάνατον· μοῖρα σοί, Ἀρχιδίκη.

"Rhadamanthys, if you have judged another woman to be kind, or you, Minos, also lead this woman to the Island of the Blessed, the daughter of Aristomachos. For she practised piety and its associate, justice. She was nurtured by Tylissos, a Cretan city, while this very earth enfolds her, immortal; this is your fate, Archidike." (Note: the first four lines are translated by A. Chaniotis: BE in *Kernos* 2016, 256.[97]

Lines 3–4 include the motif of excellent moral conduct as a prerequisite for the transportation. *Chrēstē* Archidike – a new *aristē* Alkestis – **"**practiced piety" (εὐσεβίαν ἤσκει) and 'its associate, justice" (σύνεδρον δικαιοσύνην). Lines 5–6 mention that Archidike was raised at Tylissos, on Crete, while "this very earth enfolds her immortal" (*athanaton*). "This is your fate (μοῖρα σοί), Archidike". The qualification "immortal" (l. 6) must be referring to the immortality of her soul.[98] The formula ἀμφέπει ἀθάνατον occurs once more in Demetrias, in a contemporary epigram adorning the tomb of a poet.[99] These references to immortality are considered a unicum for the third and even second century BCE and evidently relate to the elevated position of the deceased. It is significant that in the epigram of Archidike two of the three judges of the Underworld, Minos and Rhadamanthys, are addressed. This is the first attestation of Rhadamanthys in a funerary epigram along with Minos, since normally only Minos is mentioned.[100] The idea of the judgment of the soul spread from the fifth century BCE onwards and is well known from *Gorgias* and other Platonic dialogues.[101] Mili has recently linked the presence of the Judges to Archidike's Cretan origin,[102] but the motif of the

[97] Arvanitopoulos 1909, 155, no. 20; also Peek 1955, 1693; Cairon 2009, 86; Saloway 2012, 255–57.
[98] Compare the much later epigram, in *ICilicie*, 32 (Cilicia, 4th c. BCE) where there is mention (l. 5) of *athanate psyche*. Cairon 2009, 263–64 associates the qualification "immortal" with ideas of immortality and possibly with orphism; Petrovic (2010, 621) argues that since Plato the idea of the "immortal soul" had become one of the consolatory motifs of the funerary epigrams that were frequently linked with the "Isles of the Blessed".
[99] Arvanitopoulou 1934–1940, 49, no. 8, l. 4: "Now, this very earth enfolds me (*amphepei*), immortal (*athanaton*)"; Peek 1955, 1074; Cairon 2009, 231–33, no. 73.
[100] Wypustek 2013, 73 and 184. References to Rhadamanthys are rare: *SEG* 30, 60. Also Kalaitzi 2016a, 109 n. 291, 167, 94 n. 124 for the stele of Hadista (Aiani 3) from Upper Macedonia.
[101] Wypustek 2013, 88–89 and 154–55.
[102] Mili 2015, 207–8.

eternal judgment by Minos and Rhadamanthys fits equally well in a royal Macedonian foundation like Demetrias.[103] Macedonian eschatological imagery includes the judgment of the dead: Rhadamanthys, along with Aiakos and Hermes are depicted on the façade of the late fourth century BCE 'judgment tomb' at Lefkadia, ancient Mieza, implying an exalted position for the deceased warrior, who like Antigenes in the Demetrias epigram, had displayed military *arete* and valour.[104]

In another third-century BCE epigram from Pherai the deceased Pyrrhos is also praised (l.1) for his moral qualities, "prudence" (*sophrosynē*) and "virtue" (*aretē*), that granted him a happy afterlife in the "inaccessible chambers" (*adutous thalamous*) of Persephone.[105] Here the realization of a round trip to Hades is regarded as impossible: "If it were possible to make an ascent of the virtuous men, you would have come to light again, abandoning the inaccessible chambers of Persephone".[106] The expression of the improbable wish of a return of a beloved one from the Underworld is known from other Hellenistic epigrams,[107] but can also be traced back to the Classical period, for example in Euripides' *Alkestis* (ll. 122–26, discussed above). If we compare the epigram of Pyrrhos to that of Lykophron from the same city, it is evident that they express completely different ideas, and reveal parallel attitudes towards death within the same city.

Thessalian epigrams embracing Hellenistic topoi regarding the voyage of the dead occasionally to the Underworld evoke Hermes. For example, an epigram from Atrax for the physician Dikaios and his wife, Philista, dated to the late third century BCE claims (ll. 11–14) that Hermes Eriounios ("the helpful one") brought and installed them on the "Island of the Pious" (εὐσεβέων εἰς νᾶσον), among the "virtuous men" (*agathois*) (*Fig. 6–7*).[108] The desire on the part of the Thessalians, especially in the Hellenistic period, to ensure divine protection for their dead and in particular a safe passage on their journey to the Underworld is expressed by the dedication of their tombstones to Hermes Chthonios, through the depiction of a herm

[103] Given the Macedonians' fondness for Platonic philosophy. For the Platonic influence in Demetrias, Hatzopoulos 1996, 163–64; Kravaritou 2011, 122; Saloway 2012, 256 comments on the Cretan origin but also points out the Macedonian connection.
[104] Hatzopoulos 2006, 133–34, fig. 57(1); Breculaki 2006, 205–11, pls. 74–76.
[105] *IG* IX:2 429; Peek 1955, 99; Cairon 2009, 246–47, no. 78; Mili 2015, 275. Tsagalis 2008, 95 sees the "chambers of Persephone" as a well-established metaphor of Euripidean origin that in the 4th c. BCE became a common motif in Attic grave epigrams under the influence of the Eleusinian mysteries.
[106] *IG* IX:2 429, ll. 3–4: εἰ δ' ἦν τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἀνάγειν, πάλιν ἦλθες ἂν εἰς φῶ[ς]. The same formula denoting impossibility is found in *ISmyrna* 278.
[107] For example, *ISmyrna* 557.
[108] *SEG* 34, 1984, 497; Tziafalias et al. 2016, 226–31, no. 165 and pl. 34; Cairon 2009, no. 94. On Hermes Eriounios, Avagianou 1997, 209–13; Mili 2015, 274.

and/or a dedicatory inscription to him in dative or genitive.[109] The Hellenistic stelai of Demetrias are revealing, because his image is included regardless of the social status, ethnic and cultural identity of the deceased.[110]

At this point we should stress that Thessalian epigrams frequently do not express hope and anticipation, since the wrath of the divine powers towards a mortal could provoke death and/or separation from the beloved ones as punishment. A good example is an epigram from Larisa where it is stated (ll. 7–9) that Parmonis was struck by "the spirit's wrath" (*daimonos orgē*) and that grief must stop because the "deceased cannot rise" (*thanonta ouden egeirei*).[111] Another epigram from the same city expresses (ll. 6–7) a rational attitude regarding human fate: "such is life" (*tauta outōs echei o bios*).[112]

But who are the dead in the epigrams for whom a special place in the afterlife is envisaged? Archidike is exceptional by Thessalian standards. It has been claimed that she belonged to an affluent family of Cretans resident in Demetrias.[113] The use of a traditional male profile for a woman and the characterization "immortal" equates Archidike to heroines of previous eras who had beaten death (for example the *aristē* Alkestis) and reveals the interest of her social circle/family in eschatological ideas. The "immortal" Argive Phaidon, a poet, who is characterized by the Hesiodic phrase as "a servant of the Muses" (Μουσῶν θεράπων), "possessing knowledge of the traits of wisdom" (σοφὰ [εἰδώς]) must have been known among intellectuals in Thessalian cities.[114] Philiste and her husband Dikaios, a doctor, also aspire to a privileged place in the Underworld; the high esteem for doctors is confirmed by the frequent conferment of public honours in Hellenistic cities.[115]

Thus the aforementioned epigrams indicate that the commemorated individuals were members of prominent and educated families sharing eschatological/soteriological beliefs that were in vogue among contemporary philosophical circles: a virtuous lifestyle aimed at an advantageous judgment and a place in the "meadows". While it is not unthinkable that some

[109] Avagianou 2002b; Mili 2015, 274–78; see also Kalaitzi 2016 a, 65–66 in the context of her discussion of the Beroian stele of Hadea.
[110] Stamatopoulou 1999, 153–62; Kravaritou 2011, 118–19, 126 and 131; idem 2016, 141.
[111] *IG* IX:2 640; also Mili 2015, 275.
[112] *IG* IX:2 943. For the expression of doubts regarding the existence of an afterlife, see Wypustek 2013, 18–19. Also: *IG* IX:2 651, ll. 5–6 (Larisa, Roman period): "nobody is immortal" and the same formula in a gold tablet, in Blumell 2011, 166–68.
[113] Saloway 2012, 257.
[114] For Hellenistic poets: Klooster 2011, 147–74; Lefkovitz 2012, 113–27; in Thessaly: Santin 2013. The depiction of intellectuals in early Hellenistic funerary art is related to the contemporaneous rising importance of education: Harris 1989, 116–46; Zanker 1995, 75–76 and 194–97; Gribiore 2001. Also Lilimpaki-Akamati 2007 for the 'Philosophers' tomb' at Pella. A number of painted tombstones from Demetrias depict men either holding a book roll or engaged in reading and writing (e.g. Volos Museum Λ126, Λ244, Λ254, Λ351, Λ9 and possibly Λ143).
[115] Medicine and philosophy: Hankinson 2003, 275–77. Honours for doctors: Massar 2001.

of them might have been initiates to mystery cults,[116] there is no such reference in any of the inscriptions discussed so far.

In accord with contemporary trends, Thessalian epigrams stress the importance of a virtuous lifestyle as prerequisite for a better place in the afterlife, not merely participation in initiation rituals.[117] Hence there is a semantic difference between the texts of the lamellae and the epigrams; in the former the dead are asked to "unlock" the entrance to the sacred meadows of Persephone by using secret passwords received from Bakkhos or following initiation rituals, and there is no interest in publicly announcing previous moral conduct.

All stelai bearing the epigrams discussed above were found out of context, therefore we lack the opportunity to compare the grave marker with the contents of the tomb of the commemorated individuals, which surely would allow us to appreciate the entire package of messages that a family or a burying group wanted to convey for their loved ones. It has to be stressed that, with the exception of the regular presence of Hermes Chthonios, there are no further iconographic allusions to the afterlife or ideas of immortality, such as those expressed in a handful of Hellenistic stelai, such as that of Hieronymos of Rhodes, or the Apollonia stele.[118] Rather, the iconography shows emphasis on advertising current societal values.

The Evidence from Thessaly: Grave Goods

Considering now the tombs themselves, our appreciation of the burial archaeology of the region is often hindered, because of the nature of exploration, which is predominantly rescue excavations, and the absence of conservation and publication. In cases of better-known necropoleis, such as Pharsalos or Krannon, variability in tomb types is strong.[119] As we have discussed in another study, despite the existence of distinctive local styles and tomb monuments (such as tholos tombs and built chamber tombs with corbelled roofs), monumental tombs or 'rich' grave goods are very few, a feature which at first seems surprising given the proverbial wealth of the Thessalian elites.[120] With regards to the grave goods, the near absence of weapons (contrary to Archaic grave groups) or numerous metal

[116] Like Nikostrate, in Posidippos' epigram, an 'initiate' of Bacchic mysteries who appeals to the Judges, Radamanthys and Aiakos, to lead her to the house of Hades: Dignas 2004, 181–82. Also Karadima-Matsa and Dimitrova 2003, esp. 341 for the late Hellenistic epigram for an initiate to the Samothracian and Eleusinian mysteries. Kalaitzi 2016b, esp. 508–9, has already discussed this issue and has come to the same conclusion.
[117] Chaniotis 2000, 169–70 ; Chaniotis 2012b, 123–39; Chaniotis 2013, 256; Bernabé 2012, 18–19.
[118] Hieronymos relief in Berlin, Antikensammlung SK1888: Pfuhl and Möbius 1979, nr. 1481. Apollonia stele: Ceka in Eggebrecht 1988, 408–9. Also: Kalaitzi 2016 for Macedonia.
[119] Stamatopoulou 2016, 184 and 190; Katakouta and Stamatopoulou (forthcoming a); Stamatopoulou and Katakouta 2013, esp. 89–90 (for Pharsalos).
[120] Stamatopoulou 2016, 185 and 190–93; Katakouta and Stamatopoulou (forthcoming a).

objects (vessels, jewellery) is striking, especially when compared to the late seventh and early sixth century.[121]

A favoured choice throughout Thessaly in Classical and Hellenistic times seems to have been the grouping of a small number of graves, mostly monolithic stone sarcophagi or well-made and occasionally decorated cists, under tumuli. The use of a tumulus for just a few generations and the discovery of burials of both sexes as well as children suggest that they were most likely used by families. Such is the tumulus at the locality Thymarakia, in the virtually unexplored northern cemetery of Pherai, about 1 km from the city. It is situated at a prominent location, by the road to Larisa and on a hill that commands the view to Mt. Ossa and Mt. Pelion and the pass to Pagasai (*Fig. 8*).[122] It was in use from the fifth to the early second century BCE.[123] Burial was in well-made cists, consisting of monolithic marble slabs; their inner faces were carefully finished and decorated with incised Ionic columns whose capitals were accentuated with red and blue colour.[124] In four graves, dated to the late fifth century BCE, abundant organic material was preserved, offering us a rare glimpse into the furnishings of the tomb, the dress of the deceased and food offerings; they are "typical" of affluent tombs in the late Classical and Hellenistic periods.[125] Significant for our discussion is Grave 12 (*Fig. 9*); it contained the inhumed remains of a girl who had been placed on a mattress of olive branches covered with a woollen cloth. In addition to her dress, the deceased wore a pair of sandals, while another two pairs of shoes and a hat were found in the grave.[126] Near the feet a portion of meat was found.[127] Provision of food is attested in the other contemporary graves from the same tumulus, in particular Graves 14 and 17, as well as in

[121] The absence of the 'warrior' element through the deposition of armour in tombs is mirrored on the tombstones of the Classical period, where the depiction of men with weapons is not as frequent as one would have expected: Bosnakis 2013.

[122] Adrymi-Sismani 1983; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 1994, 79; Arachoviti 1994, 127, fig. 1; Stamatopoulou 1999, vol. II, cat. no. 63; idem, 2016, 193, fig. 22. This incidentally is the area where Euripides places the tomb/ *heroon* of Alkestis (vv. 835–36).

[123] Although no osteological analysis has been published, the study of the grave goods and dress of the deceased suggest that it was used both for both genders, and adults and children; this and names attested on the tombstones, which were reused to construct a later grave at the site when the tumulus had ceased to be used (in the 2nd c. BCE), imply that the tumulus was a family burial ground. For the tombstones: Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2000, 124–27.

[124] For a discussion of the architecture of the cists tombs in the mound and its significance: Katakouta and Stamatopoulou (forthcoming a).

[125] Adrymi-Sismani 1983: Graves 12 and 14 (autumn fruits: chestnuts, a few hazelnut seeds, a pomegranate, a few grape seeds; the pomegranate and the grapes were placed in a black-glaze skyphos, while the others were found by the feet of the deceased), Graves 15 and 17 (a pomegranate and a bunch of grapes placed by the left hand of the female dead).

[126] Adrymi-Sismani 1983, 29–31, fig. 3, and plan 4 on p. 28. The grave has been dated to the second half of the 5th c. BCE on the basis of a black-glaze salt cellar (Adrymi-Sismani 1983, 31, no. 7). We should note that the age of the girl has not been given.

[127] Adrymi-Sismani 1983, 31 no. 9: according to the excavator it belonged to the tibia of a sheep.

other similar contexts from across Thessaly, from example the Schismeni Magoula tumulus (near the city at Gremnos) dated to the fourth century BCE,[128] and the second-century BCE tumulus in the eastern cemetery of Larisa.[129] The practice of placing more than one pair of shoes in a single burial is also attested in a male grave from the tumulus at Sykeon, in the western Thessalian plain, used from the late fourth century to the mid-third century BCE.[130]

Food remains, usually nuts, grapes and eggs, might have been more common than current evidence suggests,[131] but unlike the lavish pyres of royalty, such as those at Aigai, it is clear that food in our contexts does not allude to a banquet at the grave. It is tempting to see some of the grave gifts, in particular the additional pair(s) of shoes, not merely as indicative of a widespread belief that the dead continued their earthy existence,[132] but instead as catering to the needs of a journey, especially given the regular presence of Hermes Chthonios on Thessalian tombstones.

A different message is conveyed by some *kterismata* from the southern cemetery of Pelinna, found on the cover slabs of the tomb of the woman carrying the ivy-shaped 'Bacchic-Orphic' gold lamellae on her breasts (*Fig. 10*); among other objects were two "modest" black-glaze bowls, the surfaces of which had been deliberately scratched after firing on either side to form the shape of an egg (*Fig. 11*).[133] The presence of the egg motif, a well-known symbol of rebirth, together with the text of the lamellae in the same grave context is quite revealing. In the other Thessalian tomb containing a gold lamella with a secure context, in the eastern cemetery of Pharsalos, the lamella was placed folded inside a bronze hydria that was decorated with a scene of the abduction of Orytheia; the hydria contained the cremated bones of the deceased together with a small drinking cup, a skyphos, which would be appropriate for rituals that the initiates are meant to partake in.[134] Unfortunately not much can be said about the context of the other lamellae, except that they accompanied both cremations and inhumations, of both men and women.

The burial evidence shows that it is exceptionally difficult to identify initiates among the dead; grave goods seem to have been appropriate for the gender and age of the deceased, although less gendered than they had been in the Archaic period. In a few cases, the fortunate preservation of organic material or the escape from looters has allowed us to discern a

[128] Milojčić 1956, 170–76 and 189–91; Biesantz 1957; Stamatopoulou 1999, vol. 1, 52, vol. 2, cat. nos. 23 and 57; Katakouta and Stamatopoulou (forthcoming b)
[129] Military airport tumulus, Tziafalias 1980, 281–82; Gallis 1982, 60–63.
[130] Hatziaggelakis 1999; Stamatopoulou 1999, vol. 1, 31–32, vol. 2, cat. no. 52, pl. 10.
[131] For food remains in tombs: Stamatopoulou 1999, vol. 1, 97, 102, n. 486, and 143–44.
[132] As Voutiras 2015, 399 aptly points out.
[133] Tziafalias 1992, 133–37, esp. 135–36 and pl. 20.
[134] Although we should bear in mind that drinking cups are among the most common grave gifts.

concern with the journey to the Underworld (Pherai, Sykeon), drinking (Pharsalos hydria with lamella), even rebirth and a blessed afterlife (Pelinna tablets, eggs on the cups from the same tomb). The desire to ensure proper provision for the passage/journey to the Underworld dates back to the late fifth century BCE, before the emergence of the popular motif of Hermes Chthonios on tombstones, whereas clear allusions to rebirth or to a blessed afterlife are a Hellenistic phenomenon, contemporary to the appearance of similar ideas in funerary epigrams.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the discussion of the myth of Alkestis and the reputation of Thessaly as a land of magic and tricks suggests that for the Athenians, and perhaps other Greeks, Thessaly was a land where a successful round trip to Hades could occur. The evidence from Thessaly itself is meagre by comparison, at least with regards to magic, but this should come as no surprise. Thessaly may not have been a strange place, although the geographical position on the northern margins of the 'Greek' world, the political system of the region, the wealth and conspicuous display of some of its elite families could have seemed alien to Athenians, who had lived under radical democracy. The combined study of texts, epigrams, iconography and tomb contexts suggests a heightened concern in Thessaly about the journey to the Underworld, a safe passage.

But some pieces of the evidence go further. Gold lamellae, especially the Pelinna ones, are a case in point; and epigrams such as that of Archidike, who appeals to the judges for a place among the pious, in the Isles of the Blessed – despite the Homeric overtones of its formulaic poetic language – could be indicative of a belief in a favourable judgment, as a first step towards a bespoke Platonic (?) round trip to Hades.[135]

[135] For differences and assimilations between Plato's eschatology and the Orphic imagery of the Netherworld: Bernabé 2013. For dimensions of individuality in religious practice and philosophical discourse: Waldner 2013; Wypustek 2013, 27–28.

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