

Introduction:

It is usually espoused, and indeed it is axiomatic, that devoid of background information of a given story one cannot fully attain the fullness of a story. It is my conviction that some of the events crossing liminality in the new testament, specially in regards to the resurrection of Christ, were written through a cultural lens that reflected Greco Roman conceptions and I will examine Greco Roman ghost narratives and see them in parallel to the new testament pericopes.

Greco Roman literature because of the mystical/philosophical nature of the language is perfect for explaining the supernatural. Whereas Latin is an ideal language for a manual, construction and anything rigid or legalistic. The dynamic(dynamic not in its literal sense but in the idea of the word δύναμις) grasp that Greek has on explaining philosophical ideas is arguably the best language for explaining the supernatural and the other worldly it's a language that thrives poetically and in a mystical context. Therefore in the literature that came from the ancient Hellens and Romans one can find the basis for many narratives in the new testament such as the notion of a divine ruler, *evangelium*, and the *parousia*. Nonetheless from now on, I will go through several texts: *Odyssey*, *Illiad*, *Aeneid*, etc., in order to examine different supernatural stories, maintaining a focus on ghosts primarily but not only ,and see how they fit with some of the events in the New Testament.

Before examining Classical ghost stories, we must investigate the categories of spirits that were believed to exist. Ghosts can be categorized in four groups: *Aôroi*, the ones who perished at a young age and have returned to haunt a place; *Biaiothanatoi*, the ones who had a violent death for example warriors or executed criminals; *Agamoi*, the ones who died before marriage and hence were bitte; and finally *Ataphoi* those who did not receive a proper burial

and could not rest because of it. ¹ Out of all the mentioned ghosts, the second group would be the most useful to research about in order to see what parallels there are with the apparitions of Jesus' post mortem, because he died of violent death and was counted as a criminal.

Ancient Greek ghost's apparitions and its parallels with Jesus post mortem pericopes:

Prior to engaging with the ghost stories, I will show a couple of examples where we can see parallels between Greek ethics and the ethics of the Gospel of John. A common civic background was present.

"Only those in love are prepared to die for one another"²

(Plato's Symposium 179B)

"This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

(1 John 3:16) New Jerusalem Bible

"It is true also of the good person that he does a great deal for his friends and his country, and will die for them if he must"³

(Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics IX 1169a)

"No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends"

(John 15:13) New Jerusalem Bible

In this case we see how in order to be truly in love, or to love, being ready to give one's life for another person is the requisite. Hengel points out that new testament got these conceptions from the ancient Greek literature.⁴

¹ Ogden, D., 2002. *Magic, witchcraft, and ghosts in the Greek and Roman worlds*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, p.146.

² Plato., Howatson, M. and Sheffield, F., 2008. *Plato, the Symposium*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.10.

³ Crisp, R., 2000. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.176.

⁴ Hengel, M., 1981. *The atonement*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, pp.9-13.

Regarding actual ghost stories, it must be noticed that in general ghosts in ancient Greek thought could consume sacrifices but could not be touched or grabbed, the example of Odysseus' mother is fitting one.⁵ Let us compare that pericope with the apparitions of Jesus risen in John and Luke.

I see the ghost of my long-lost mother here before me...she cannot bear to look me in the eyes — her own son —or speak a word to me...‘One rule there is,’ the famous seer explained, ...Any one of the ghosts you let approach the blood will speak the truth to you. Anyone you refuse will turn and fade away...my mother approached and drank the dark, clouding blood. She knew me at once and wailed out in grief and her words came winging toward me,...And I, my mind in turmoil, how I longed to embrace my mother's spirit, dead as she was! Three times I rushed toward her...three times she fluttered through my fingers...Mother —why not wait for me? How I long to hold you...My noble mother answered me at once...this is just the way of mortals when we die...Sinews no longer bind the flesh and bones together.⁶

(Odyssey XI 142-158/212-222)

As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realise that it was Jesus...Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?...Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father...

(John 20:14-17) New Jerusalem Bible

“They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!...In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost...Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have...they were dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?...And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes”

(Luke 24:36-43) New Jerusalem Bible

The first thing that can be noticed is that Odysseus' mother does not speak nor looks at him and she is in need to drink blood in order to be able to communicate, while in the Gospel of John, Jesus is the one initiating the conversation without needing anything. Secondly, in Odysseus' story, the ghost is the one in sorrow whereas in the Gospel it is the person alive who is in grief by seeing a person, Jesus, who died and was alive again.

⁵ Burkert, W., 1985. *Greek religion*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp.194-196.

⁶ Homer. and Fagles, R., 1997. *The Odyssey*. New York: Penguin Books, pp.254-256.

Thirdly, Odysseus tries to grab her mother but she vanishes, meanwhile the woman can touch Jesus to the point he tells her not to cling to him. Finally as Prince notices there is a parallel expression in both texts *σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα* (flesh and bones) diametrically opposed in the narrative, Odysseus' mother does not have flesh and bones and she explains that this is because that is the nature of ghosts and Jesus about whom the Gospel of Luke portrays saying the very same words saying that he has flesh and bones and that proves he is not a ghost. ⁷

Also in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, it can be seen the very nature of the ghosts being non tangible. The story of Achilles being visited by the ghost of Patroclus and Aeneas seeing the ghost of Creusa.

“Throw our arms around each other, just for a moment take some joy in the tears that numb the heart!” In the same breath he stretched his loving arms but could not seize him, no, the ghost slipped underground like a wisp of smoke ... with a high thin cry. And Achilles..... cried in desolation, "Ah god! So even in Death's strong house there is something left, a ghost, a phantom-true, but no real breath of life..”⁸

(*Iliad* XXIII 96-104)

“She deserted me, fading away on the winds without substance. Three times I tried to encircle her neck with my arms as I stood there, Three times, alas, all in vain. For the image eluded my grasping Hands, like a slight puff of air, as a dream flutters off from a dreamer..”⁹

(*Aeneid* II 791-794)

"And suddenly, coming to meet them, was Jesus. 'Greetings,' he said. And the women came up to him and, clasping his feet, they did him homage."

(Matthew 28:9) New Jerusalem Bible

⁷ Prince, D., 2007. The 'Ghost' of Jesus: Luke 24 in Light of Ancient Narratives of Post-Mortem Apparitions. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 29(3), pp.287-301.

⁸ Homer., Fagles, R. and Knox, B., 1991. *The Iliad*. London: Penguin Books, pp.562-563.

⁹ Virgil. and Ahl, F., 2008. *Aeneid*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.53

Once again we can see the difference between the vanishing Ghosts when they are going to be touched and Jesus being able to be grabbed. Clearly the Gospel authors are letting their audience know that Jesus was not simply a ghost. Nonetheless, Prince states that there is something particular to keep in mind and that is the ghosts of Heroes were palpable. She gives different examples the narration by Herodotus about Astrobacus' ghost having intercourse with the mother of Demartus king of Sparta (*Hist* 6.69) or the story narrated by Pausanias about the ghost of the hero of Temesa being beaten in a boxing match by Euthymus (*Descr.* 6.6.7-11).¹⁰

I do think that taking heed to what Prince says we can get a synthesis that can go in two different ways. For one, the palpability of ghosts became a trend in literature but it was not the traditional conception, the works of Herodotus and Pausanias are not as important in the folkloric culture tradition as the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. I also want to call attention upon the figure of Patroclus who was a hero and was not palpable in the very *Aeneid* as shown previously. On the other hand, it could be that new testament authors were conscious about tangible ghosts being only or mostly those of heroes and they wanted to make clear that Jesus was an actual hero. This second way of synthesis, I think, is less likely due to the statement found in Luke where Jesus says “Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones” (Lk 24:39). At least for the Gospel author, it is clear that the nature of ghosts that he had in mind were of those that were intangible.

It is also important that the risen Jesus never appeared at night, the majority of ghosts appeared at night, Felton explains night was associated with darkness and darkness was

¹⁰ Prince, D.

associated with death hence why ghosts were thought to appear at night, night was the time for terrors and mysteries; he also references Plato (*Rep II 381e*) who speaks about his dislike for mothers telling children about ghosts roaming at night..¹¹ Yet again Jesus appearing only by daylight time could be another literary resource to vindicate that he was not a ghost. This common belief of sightseeing of ghosts by night, probably, was one of the causes why in the gospels once the apostles confused Jesus with a ghost when he walked on water. The pericope in the Gospel of Mark before narrating that the apostles thought that Jesus was a ghost, it tells us that it was the fourth watch of the night:

"He could see that they were hard pressed in their rowing, for the wind was against them; and about the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea. He was going to pass them by, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost and cried out;"

(Mark 6:48-49) New Jerusalem Bible

Another particularity of ghosts is bearing the wounds that caused their death, here we could only talk about the ones who died of violent death hence why the wounds. That sounds logical, but wounds had another important meaning.

In the *Aeneid* we can read the story of Sychaeus a Phoenician landlord who married the virgin Dido who was given to Sychaeus by her father after having consulted the wedding omens. Nonetheless, Pygmalion was ruling Tyre and he was the brother of the girl, after having a brawl with his brother-in-law, he ended up killing Sychaeus. Pygmalion hid what he did but the ghost of Sychaeus appeared to his wife in her dreams, He appeared with a visible

¹¹ Felton, D., 1999. *Haunted Greece and Rome*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp.6-7.

wound that the text seems to put as an evidence of his actual death as we will see. (*Aeneid* I 341-355).

On the other hand we have Odysseus, albeit not being a ghost, when he returned to his father's home, he wanted to see if his father would recognize him, the old man could not so Odysseus revealed him who he was but the his father doubted him, so Odysseus in order to prove who he was showed his scar (*Odyssey* XXIV 216-333). Let us see the parallels between these two texts and those of the gospels.

“in her dreams, the true form of her unburied husband approached her, Raising before her a face that was wasted with terrible pallor, Baring the truth of the brutal crime at the altar, the daggered Breast...”¹²

(*Aeneid* I 353-356)

“Father —I am your son —myself, the man you're seeking...” “You —you're truly my son, Odysseus, home at last? Give me a sign, some proof —I Must be sure.”... This scar first,” quick to the mark, his son said, “look at this — the wound I took from the boar's white tusk...”¹³

(*Odyssey* XXIV 324/ 331-335)

"They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!' .In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts stirring in your hearts? See by my hands and my feet that it is I myself "Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.'

(Luke 24:39) New Jerusalem Bible

"Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, 'We have seen the Lord,' but he answered, 'Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made...I refuse to believe.'" "Eight days later..." "Jesus came..." "Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands..'"

(John 20:24-27) New Jerusalem Bible

Examining these texts the *Aeneid* that says about the ghost “baring the truth of

¹² Virgil. and Ahl, F,p. 14

¹³ Homer., Fagles, R. and Knox, B.,p. 478

the brutal crime". When we look at the gospel of Luke, we see that Thomas asks for two things: to see Jesus' wounds and to touch him. Both things should be examined in a separated way, the truth that identifies Sychaeus and Jesus are their wounds in both cases. Nonetheless touching Jesus, the desire of John, is what will distinguish Jesus from a ghost. On one hand we see that the wounds serve as the identifier and on the other hand the palpability attests the non ghostly nature of Jesus.

In the case of Odysseus, who is alive, we notice that his scar serves as the first evidence to prove himself to be who he claims. Macdonald tell us that the identification of someone by his or her scars it is found elsewhere as well in Greek literature, he gives the example of Orestes being recognized by Electra due to his scar along his brown in the narrative of Euripides (*Electra* 573-74); Macdonald also writes about Oedipus that what forced him to recognize his parricide and having married his mother were the scars of the wounds he bore on his ankles that he had since he was a child (*Sophocles Oedipus Tyrannus* 993-98). Finally, Macdonald says that for Aristotle the scar of Odysseus was one of the most successful signs used for recognition in ancient literature.¹⁴ When we compare it to the narrative of the gospel of John, if we pay attention we see Jesus saying two things: "Put your finger here; look, here are my hands" and again I see these two actions to be taken separately. Putting the finger in his wounds, actual touching, was to prove that he was not a ghost, yet looking at his hands was a method of verification.

As a conclusion for this section dealing with ghosts in the Greco Roman literature and its impact on the new testament and Jesus post mortem apparitions, we must look at the very use of it which is done in different ways. In the first place, the gospel authors use the folkloric

¹⁴ Macdonald, D., 2010. *Homeric epics and the gospel of mark*. London: Yale University Press, p.116.

background of their audience to make the point that Jesus was not a ghost by creating totally different characteristics in the apparitions of Jesus. He appears on the day light, he can be touched while the opposite was norm in Greco Roman ,

Divine ruler, *Evangelium, Parousia*.....: (pensar título):

Conclusion: