The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Moni (review)

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Journal of Modern Greek Studies, Volume 11, Number 2, October 1993, pp. 318-320 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2010.0158*

past, we must not forget that Greece did not emerge from the literary ghetto until the late 1940s. Only then did it become part of the international literary scene—and that was the contribution of the poets and novelists of the 1930s.

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C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1991. Pp. ix + 275. $45.00 hardback, $16.95 paperback.

In her richly suggestive study of mourning practices in Inner Mani, C. Nadia Seremetakis argues and cogently demonstrates that Maniat women's work of divination, lamentation, and exhumation is, rather than one ritual cycle among others, "the primary resource for the creation and dissemination of aesthetic form (music and poetry), juridical discourse, gender identity, and indigenous oral history" (3). Mourning ceremonies, in Seremetakis's view, are not merely expressions of grief but instruments of cultural power; during the mortuary cycle, women's bodies are made visible, their pain is made audible, and their labor becomes politically and culturally transformative. *The Last Word* is both a fascinating primary text—a finely nuanced narrative of women, Maniat society, and mourning—and a sensitive and astute reading of that text: an analysis of cultural marginality, gender-inflected resistance, the politics of pain, and women's language about death.

Inner Mani is the region at the southernmost tip of the "middle finger" of the Peloponnese, an area of subsistence farming, historically infamous for its pirates and its remarkable resistance to both Christianity and Ottoman rule. *The Last Word* contains a detailed discussion of Maniat society—its history, topographical constraints, social organization, and economy—that provides readers with a crucial contextual framework for the book's subsequent study of women and their mortuary labor. The substance of Seremetakis's project, however, is devoted to the tripartite mortuary cycle. First, Seremetakis studies Maniat women's divination practices, their "low-voiced" decipherment of the "surrogate symbols, indirect signs, substitutions, and tokens" (49) that function as warnings of death. Second, and most extensively, Seremetakis explores the Maniat *kláma* or mourning ceremony, which is performed entirely by women—by a soloist who improvises a lament in 8-syllable verse, and a chorus that provides antiphonal response. In the chapters devoted to the *kláma,* Seremetakis cites a number of lamentations, both in translation and transliteration, narrates the oral history that surrounds them, and interprets them through close readings. Her readings of Maniat *kláma* also include a fascinating discussion of the often contestatory relation of the *kláma* to the all-male juridical council (the *yerondikí*) and the Orthodox funeral liturgy. Third, Seremetakis

studies the Maniat practices of exhumation, bone reading, and second burial, and the ways in which these practices function as a site for revising personal and clan history. *The Last Word* is, in addition, helpfully equipped with maps, an excellent bibliography, materials from the author's own dream journal, and an uncommonly plangent photo essay.

In *The Last Word,* Seremetakis seeks to negotiate a theoretical space between a universal humanism that erases the cultural specificities of death experience and a Durkheimian perspective in which death, emptied of its singularity among cultural artifacts, functions as "an empty stage for a variety of other social dramas" (14). She constructs this space primarily by linguistic analysis, by exploring the discursive network in which words of mourning are inscribed—a network of intersections between ancient Greek, Modern Greek, and Maniat dialect. She argues, moreover, on the basis of her close and polyvalent readings, that this space cannot be accurately described in terms of the binary sets public/private, rural/urban, male/female, overt/covert, which have dominated descriptions of Mediterranean societies. Concomitantly, Seremetakis seeks to negotiate a *methodological* space beyond that circumscribed by oppositions between ethnographer and object, observer and participant, outsider and insider. While Seremetakis, who is both Maniat and American, is fortuitously posed to create this space, her fieldwork is also purposefully comprised of both observing and mourning, and her analyses deliberately investigate not only the other, but herself. Indeed, perhaps the most striking evidence that Seremetakis has succeeded in creating this methodological space is the fact that her recording instruments were ultimately absorbed into local ritual practice.

One of the most fascinating and significant parts of Seremetakis's study is her extended discussion of the antiphonal structure of mourning practice, a discussion that cogently demonstrates the way in which women's mourning functions as an instrument of cultural power. According to Seremetakis, antiphony, which is linguistically both a juridical and an aesthetic notion, designates: "(1) the social structure of mortuary ritual; (2) the internal acoustic organization of lament singing; (3) a prescribed technique for witnessing, for the production/reception of jural discourse, and for the cultural construction of truth; and (4) a political strategy that organizes the relation of women to male-dominated institutions" (100). The *kláma,* then, through its antiphonal (and sometimes conflictive) testimonies and confirmations, makes juridical decisions and constructs truths that are ratified by the affective potency of pain. Historically, these judgments and truths either reinforced or contested the decisions and truths made by the *yerondikí* (the all-male council) on issues such as "revenge code killings, inheritance and other property disputes, marital relations, and kin obligations" (126). While the *yerondikí* no longer exists in its traditional form, the structural opposition between *kláma* and *yerondikí* is "currently replicated by the adversarial relations of the male-dominated ideologies of modernization and urbanization and the ritual practices of women" (127). The *kláma,* moreover, stands in an oppositional relation to the Orthodox funeral chant, which is "aesthetically, stylistically, and ideologically antithetical to the *moirolói* (lament)" (165). Indeed, while the priest's chant

initially silences the women's *kláma* during the mourning ceremony at the graveside, the women's *kláma* begins again and the mourning ceremony culminates in an acoustic and discursive confrontation between *kláma* and funeral chant, women and priest—a confrontation that, according to Seremetakis, "reproduces the tensions and antagonisms that are present in the lives of the mourners: the opposition between men and women, between religious or scientific rationality and local forms of divination, between clan and external institutions" (167).

The Last Word is a fascinating and important book that will no doubt be of interest to a wide range of readers. While Seremetakis, in my view, discredits some binary oppositions more convincingly than others, and while there are moments in *The Last Word* where I wish that the author, from her privileged perspective, had explored her findings in greater theoretical detail, the significance of this book is, it seems to me, precisely that it gestures in so many directions and that it constructs a text that is open to so many re-readings. Indeed the pleasure of *The Last Word* is that it is *not* the last word, or, rather, that like the "last word" of the Maniat woman's lament, it is less a closure than an evocative and beckoning gesture to that which exceeds it.

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Gerasimos Augustinos, *The Greeks of Asia Minor: Confession, Community, and Ethnicity in the Nineteenth Century.* Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press. 1992. Pp. x + 270. $39.00.

This is a well-written, well-documented, readable book. It gives us a comprehensive account of the Ottoman Greek communities of Asia Minor in the middle decades of the nineteenth century in terms of confession, community organization, and ethnic identity. As such, it fills an important gap in the historiography not only of Modern Greece but also of the Ottoman Empire, for the author studies one of the principal non-Muslim communities of the Empire and its relation to the Ottoman state and its policies. Furthermore, taking the Greeks as a case study, the author grapples with issues such as perceptions of self-identity in the Ottoman Empire or the degree of success of the *tanzimat* reforms in forging cohesiveness among the Empire's multiethnic communities. These are some of the issues that are currently debated in Ottoman historiography, thus rendering the work's contribution to the field particularly pertinent. Also, the author treats the relations of the communities with the Greek state and with that state's brand of nationalism as expressed by the Great Idea, topics that have not been adequately addressed in Modern Greek historiography.

The author sees the nineteenth century as a period of revival, a come-