The Oblivious Memory of Images: The 'Burial of the Count of Orgaz' and the Mediterranean Afterlife of the Ancient Lament *

Del recuerdo al olvido: El 'entierro del conde Orgaz' y la fortuna mediterránea del lamento fúnebre

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To James S. Amelang
on his 70th birthday

Death hides no secret. It opens no door. It is the end of a person.
What survives is what he or she has given to other people, what stays in their memory.

Norbert Elias
The Loneliness of the Dying

Abstract

The composition of the Burial of the Count of Orgaz replicates the structure of Medieval Castilian sepulchers. At the same time, the narrative iconography that decorates these monuments shows images of ritual lament that have their roots in Ancient scenes of the so-called *Prothesis.* This article analyzes the painting of El Greco from the point of view of the construction of a collective memory and interprets the scene as a sophisticated effort to reproduce, or remember, and at the same time repress or forget, the memory of a ritual tradition.

Keywords: El Greco, Funerary lament, Collective Memory, Cultural Memory, Local memory, Prothesis, Endechas, Count of Orgaz.

Resumen

La composición del Entierro del Conde de Orgaz replica la de los sepulcros medievales castellanos y la iconografía que decora estos monumentos representa, a su vez, escenas de lamento

ritual que hunden sus raíces la cultura figurativa clásica, concretamente en el tema conocido como *Prothesis*. Este artículo aborda la pintura del Greco en la construcción de una memoria colectiva y la interpreta como un sofisticado esfuerzo para recoger, o recordar, y al mismo tiempo reprimir, u olvidar, una tradición funeraria arraigada desde la Antigüedad en el Mediterráneo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: El Greco, lament fúnebre, memoria colectiva, memoria local, prothesis, endechas, Conde Orgaz.

In 2016 the promising career of Luis Salom was cut short by an accident in Barcelona while he was training for the Catalan *Grand Prix*. On June 4th, his motorcycle crashed against a safety barrier at the end of the track and Luis met almost instant death. Salom was only 24 years old. The death of the young Mallorcan rider deeply shocked the sports world and was covered extensively in the media. The funeral was held in the Cathedral of Mallorca. At the ceremony journalists noticed the strange appearance of Luis's mother, who attended mass with her head shaved. As was later known, she had cut off all her hair at the funeral home. Newspapers soon revealed the reason. Luis had loved playing with his mother's long black hair when he was a boy. As a sign of eternal love and everlasting grief, she had placed some locks of her hairs in her son's hands, twined around his fingers[1].

This sign of grief resonates with ancient stories of ritual bereavement in the Mediterranean. In Book XXIII of the Iliad (145-155), Achilles mourns Patroclus's death with a similar gesture. At his friend's deathbed the Greek hero cut his hair and put some locks of it into Patroclus's hands before the body of his beloved friend was burnt on a pyre:

> Now, therefore, seeing I go not home to my dear native land, I would fain give unto the warrior Patroclus this lock to fare with him." He spoke and set the lock in the hands of his dear comrade, and in them all aroused the desire of lament. And now would the light of the sun have gone down upon their weeping[2].

Gestures of mourning in the Mediterranean have a long history and have left an important, profound imprint on its visual culture. The very same image of the mourner's shaved head may be the most evident one. A grave stele from Rhodes dated 420 BC, for example,

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[1] "La madre de Luis Salom se corta el pelo ante el féretro de su hijo", *El Mundo,* 11/06/2016.

[2] HOMER, *The Iliad* with an English Translation by A.T. MURRAY, Ph.D. in two volumes. Cambridge, MA./London, 1924.

shows two women: the dead mother, Timarista, dressed in a peplos, passes her arm over the shoulder of her daughter, Krito, who has shaved her head as a sign of grief for her loss (Fig. 1).

In the following pages I will look into some examples of images' memory of ritual mourning around the Mediterranean, in between Ancient Greece and Counter-reformation Spain. The capacity of images to fabricate, fix and transmit memories is shaped by the specificity of *pictures* as a visual medium. This article draws on a long historiographical tradition that has reflected in the past and continues to investigate the particular power of images to produce what has been defined as a persistent "unconscious memory"[3]. The recent story of a funeral in Mallorca that I have just recalled speaks, I believe, of one aspect of this phenomenon, here not however in the form of a picture, but of a ritual act.

If pictures are not unique in their contribution to this continuity, being just one element in a far-reaching and complex process in which ritualistic, written and oral mechanisms combine, it is not less true that pictures' role in the construction of what I will be calling "cultural memory" is not limited to one of

Fig. 1. Grave stele of Krito and Timarista, 5th c. BC. Archaeological Museum, Rhodes (photo: Wikimedia Commons)

endurance: Images are agents of memory as much as images –or more specifically pictures– are instruments of cultural neglect and forgetfulness. My purpose in this article is to reflect on the pictures of grief and mourning from the point of view of the mechanics of cultural memory in this broader sense. This means to look at the persistence and survival to which art history has devoted a lot of attention, in the mirror of the opposite phenomenon: that of image's power to censure, misrepresent or even suppress social reality. In other words, I propose to consider processes in the transmission, contagion and continuity of visual culture in relation to those of resistance, discontinuity and, finally, oblivion. It is, I propose, only when considered as a result of these two dialectical facets that the contribution of the arts to Spain's struggle with its multi-confessional past comes to light.

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[3] G. Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps de fantômes selon Aby Warburg,* Paris, 2002, p. 307.

The *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*

Because the topic of this paper is *memory,* I will proceed backwards. The *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (Fig. 2) is certainly one of the most famous and complex images of mourning ever produced in Iberia. The painting shows the scene of a burial surrounded by a large number of unidentified people who are attending the ritual of laying the Count's body in its grave. With the Count of Orgaz's Burial, however, El Greco was also forced to address the problematic relation of painting to memory: first because of the intrinsic nature of its subject, and second because the episode he was commissioned to paint was not from his time, but a legendary, historical one. With the Burial El Greco received in 1586 an unusual commission: his painting had to represent an event that happened in 1312, almost three hundred years before. It was the moment when –according to a very popular legend– two saints, Augustine and Stephen, descended from heaven to lay the body of Gonzalo Ruiz de Toledo in his grave. Gonzalo Ruiz was not a canonized saint himself, although he was thought to have lived a saintly life. In collections of the lives of local saints (*santorales*), the memory of his deeds is recorded under the specific category of "extravagant" saints:

> …And since our Lord [God] wished to show that he had accepted his services, his body [Ruiz de Toledo's] was taken to the said church of Santo Tomé to be buried, and lying on a bier in the middle of the church, accompanied by all the nobles of this city, the divine offices having been said over him, and wishing to take up his body in order to bury it, they saw the glorious saints, Saint Stephen and Saint Augustine, descend visibly from heaven and when they reached the bier, picked up his body and took it to the grave, where in presence of all they placed it, saying: such an award is given to him who serves God and his saints. And then they disappeared, leaving [the space] full of the divine scent[4].

There was of course no proof of the miracle other than oral tradition. In fact we know that the church had to ask permission of Toledo's archbishop to have the episode painted, as the miracle had not been investigated, nor did any specific ecclesiastical authorization exist. There was, however, a very good reason why the priest of the parish church of Santo Tomé would want to have it painted more than three hundred years after the event: as stated in his will, every year the city of Orgaz had to give a respectable amount of money and goods to the church of Santo Tomé. The village's donation was offered in honor of the saint, but also in memory (*memorias* is the word used in the documents) of Don Gonzalo.

However, in the year 1551 the town of Orgaz refused to continue supporting the donation. Its refusal led to a long legal dispute at the Royal Chancery tribunal of Valladolid between the parish of Santo Tomé, led by its very combative priest, Andrés Núñez de Madrid –who has usually been recognized as present at the burial– on the one hand and the city of Orgaz on the other. It was this particular conflict that led to the commission of El Greco's painting. Its goal was twofold: to celebrate the priest's victory at the Valladolid tribunal, and to remember the legendary miracle at the site of the benefactor's grave. The preservation of Don Gonzalo's

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[4] See most recently F. Marías, *El Greco. Historia de un pintor extravagante,* San Sebastián, 2013², pp. 172-177; *Idem*, "Parish Church of Santo Tomé, Toledo", in *El Greco of Toledo. Painter of the Visible and the Invisible,* Toledo, 2014, pp. 271-275; J. Álvarez Lopera, *El Greco: Estudio y Catálogo,* Madrid, 2006; and F. Pereda, "El Greco, Painting and Collective Memory", in *El Greco's Visual Poetics*, Osaka, 2012, pp. 182-188, 254-263.
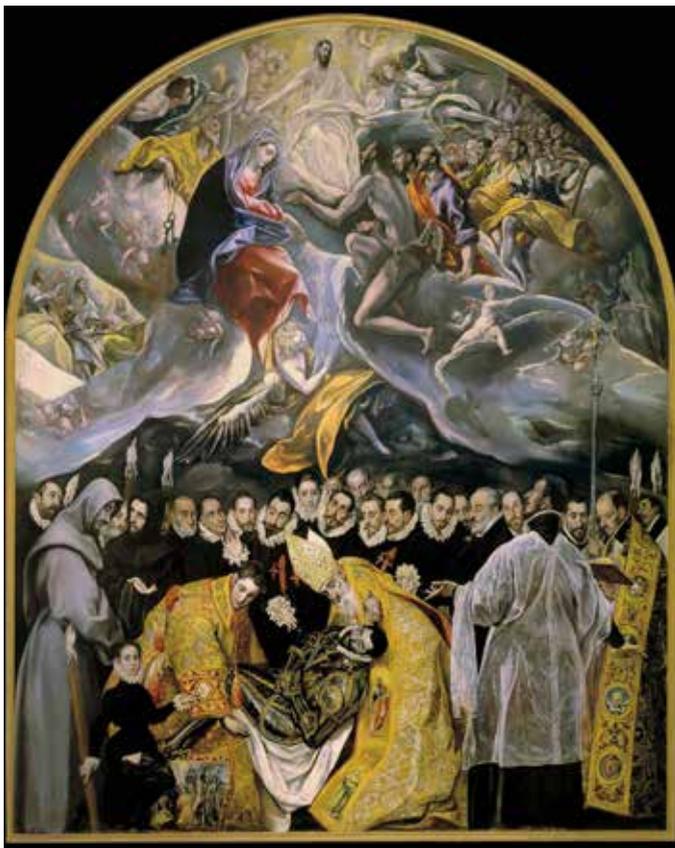
Fig. 2. El Greco, The Burial
of the Count of Orgaz. Santo
Tomé (Toledo)

"memories" –both spiritual and economic– had not only been the motif of the trial with the city of Toledo; it also became the element around which the whole of the priest's restitution campaign was orchestrated. Right after the Valladolid tribunal had given him the impetus, but before the painting was commissioned, Andrés had a local erudite humanist make an epitaph that would be placed over his tomb.

Alvar Gómez de Castro crafted the epitaph in the style that Ancient Greeks and Romans used for burial sites of heroic citizens. In humanistic Latin, the plaque uses the imperative to address the wayfarer, inviting him to stop for a moment: *Siste paululum viator* (Halt, traveler, for a moment!) and –so the epitaph continues–: "listen to an old story from our city, briefly told." The epitaph calls on the viewer not to read but to "listen," emphasizing the oral nature of the legendary tradition[5]. The humanist's source for the epitaph was probably not only literary but archaeological. In previous years a collection of Roman inscriptions and epitaphs collected from

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[5] R. HERNÁNDEZ PÉREZ, *Poesía latina sepulcral en la Hispania Romana,* Valencia, 2001. See also P. KRUSCHWITZ, "Memento mori: the use(s) of the future imperative in the Carmina Latina Epigraphica", in *Ex officina. Literatura epigráfica en verso,* Sevilla, 2013, pp. 193-216.

antiqua monumenta from Italy, as well local examples found in Iberia, was being put together at the University of Alcalá where Gómez de Castro was teaching[6]. Together, priest and humanist looked for a formula that would present the miracle as part of local memory. El Greco's painting would be hung immediately above it. In it the little boy who seriously, if not dispassionately, points with his finger to the scene behind him visually follows the same logic: *Look and see*, he seems to be saying to us. We will return to this figure at the end of this article.

There is no question that El Greco succeeded in his commission. Only a few years after the painting was delivered, in 1610, the local chronicler Francisco de Pisa celebrated the painting in Santo Tomé, not for its quality but for the success it enjoyed in the city: "Foreigners come to see [the painting] with particular admiration, and the people of the city never tire of it ...". Surprisingly, most literature on the painting has taken this quotation literally, believing that El Greco would have imagined the scene as if it happened in the 1580s, its "modernity" resting on its having given a "realistic" representation of a funeral in Spain[7]. This would have both surprised and appealed to Toledo's citizens. There are good reasons for this, the most important one being the procession of noblemen that crosses the scene: thirty-two figures surround the body of a knight dressed in his armour at the moment that his body is being laid in the grave.

The noblemen are all dressed in solemn black, a fashion that had been introduced in Castile under the Emperor Charles V but had been generalized only in the previous two decades[8]. The one element that stands out on their deep black garments is the shape of the red cross on their chests, identifying them as members of the military order of Santiago (Saint James), an order made famous during the centuries of the Reconquest. But if the color of their coats was a recent innovation destined to characterize Spanish fashion, the other prominent element of their costume was not only new but would also be ephemeral: all of the men are wearing opulent ruff collars (*lechugillas*) framing their elongated faces, a recent –and quite expensive– trend in fashion that was not to last very long[9]. Less than twenty-five years after the painting was delivered, beginning in 1621, several sumptuary decrees by Philip IV, while making black obligatory for Court dress, tried at the same time to eradicate the use of these collars, in an effort to put some limit on Spaniards' love of luxury[10]. "Fashion," therefore –the word of course

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[6] M. T. Callejas Berdones, "«Quaedam antiqua Monumenta», ¿de Juan Calvete de Estrella?", *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica*, 22 (1989), pp. 161-166; M. F. del Barrio Vega, "La recopilación epigráfica de Juan Calvete de Estrella (1559)", in *Ex officina. Literatura epigráfica en verso*, pp. 19-38.

[7] With particular emphasis, S. Schroth, "El entierro del Conde de Orgaz", in J. Brown (ed.), *Visiones del Pensamiento. Estudios sobre El Greco,* Madrid, 1984, pp. 11-36; D. Davies, "From the Letter to the Spirit: Levels of Meaning in *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz",* in N. Hadjinicolau (ed.), *El Greco. The First Twenty Years in Spain,* Rethymno, 2005, pp. 123-149.

[8] J. Harvey, *Men in Black,* 1995, pp. 74-114.

[9] "Los cuellos ... recogidos quedan haciendo ondas semejantes a las hojas de las lechugas encarrujadas. Estos han tenido y tienen diferente proporción, porque al principio fueron pequeñitas y *aora* [my emphasis] han crecido tanto que más parecen hojas de lampaços que de lechugas". Sebastián de Covarrubias, *Diccionario,* 1611. See on the *lechuguillas*: C. Bernis, *El traje y los tipos sociales en El Quijote,* Madrid, 2001, pp. 179-186.

[10] A. Sánchez Jiménez, "Cuellos, valonas y golillas: leyes suntuarias y crítica política en 'No hay mal que por bien no venga', de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón", *Bulletin of the Comediantes,* 54 (2002), pp. 91-113; See R. L. Kennedy, "Certain Phases of the Sumptuary Decrees of 1623 and their Relations to Tirso's Theatre", *Hispanic Review*, X (1942), pp. 91-115. R. de la Puerta, "Las leyes suntuarias y la restricción del lujo en el vestir", in J. L. Colomer, A. Descalzo

has no possible translation for the sixteenth century, but the practice existed– locates the scene in the painting within a narrow time-frame, no more than one generation.

But fashion is not the only element in the painting that would have caused contemporary citizens of Toledo to find the scene familiar. There are other important aspects that were clearly borrowed from late-sixteenth-century burial practices: one is the presence of the mendicant order of friars; another is the nocturnal setting, lit only by the huge torches carried by those attending the burial; and the last, as important as any other detail, is the participation of children, a fundamental element in any burial at the time. Although here reduced to only one character, the child would have been recognized as one of the so-called *niños de doctrina* who used to participate in funerals[11]. These "little children of death" (*meninos de la muerte*, as Francisco de Quevedo called them) were young orphans hired to participate in funerals to help produce a collective sense of contained grief. The ostentatious presence of these anecdotal elements of the ceremony has prompted many art historians down to most recent times to consider the "Burial of the Count of Orgaz" realistic, one of the "most truthful pages of Spanish Golden Age Painting" in the words of the Spanish art historian Cossío[12].

Local and Cultural Memory

In what follows I will attempt a rather different explanatory model. For the *Burial* El Greco was given the unusual task of representing a historical episode from the remote past. This, I will argue, invited the artist to reflect on the medium's historicity and on how paintings shape and build collective memory. As a result, the painting appears less as a reflection of history than as a deliberate manipulation of it[13]. Before going further, I will say a few words about what I mean by "collective memory."

At the beginning of the twentieth century two social historians developed, unbeknownst to each other, their own respective theories of social or collective memory: one was a sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, and the other an art historian, Aby Warburg. "Social memory," –as Warburg called the now more frequently used term "collective memory"– referred to images as the cultural reification or crystallization of memory. As is very well known, Warburg was particularly interested in the afterlife or *Nachleben* of images, which he was able to show allowed for a completely different understanding of the role of images, and *art*, in history. The main focus of Warburg and Maurice Halbwachs's interest, however, was not the institutional or even political side of collective memory. Both reflected more on how memory was fabricated and preserved, and less on how it could be repressed or forgotten. What interested them

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(eds.), *Vestir a la española en las cortes de Europa (siglos XVI y XVII)*, 2 vols, Madrid, 2014, I, pp. 209-231. The replacement of the *lechuguilla* by the more sober *golilla* or the *Valona* at the beginning of the reign of Philip IV (1621-) has been considered the immediate effect of this legislation. See C. Bernis, "La moda en los retratos de Velázquez", in J. Portús, (ed.), *El retrato en el Museo del Prado,* Madrid, 1994, pp. 270-301, part. 271-273.

[11] F. Martínez Gil, *Muerte y sociedad en la España de los Austrias,* Madrid, 1993, pp. 409-411.

[12] M. B. Cossío, *El Entierro del Conde de Orgaz,* Madrid, 1914.

[13] For the two models of social memory here discussed (Halbwachs vs. Warburg) see J. Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", *New German Critique* 65 (1995), pp. 125-133; Id., "Communicative and Cultural Memory", in A. Erll, A. Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies,* Berlin/New York, 2010, pp. 109-118.

was the mechanisms of permanence rather than those of oblivion. In the words of Jan Assmann, who has written extensively on both the potential and the limitations of the two men's projects: "Cultural memory reaches back into the past only so far as the past can be reclaimed as 'ours'." This makes collective memory a very different thing from knowledge, but also from history: "While knowledge has no form and is endlessly progressive, memory involves forgetting. It is only by forgetting what lies outside the horizon of the relevant that it performs an identity function"[14].

The *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* is, I think, an extraordinary and highly sophisticated example of this phenomenon. I believe that the painting consciously draws on a medieval figurative tradition, not to preserve it but to turn it on its head. The painting is traditionally praised for its detailed realism, as if we were attending a funeral in late-sixteenth-century Toledo. I would like, however, to call attention to some less-familiar elements in the painting that have gone almost unnoticed (often, a philosopher has said, "One is unable to notice something– because it is always before one's eyes")[15].

First, and maybe more decisively from an iconographic point of view, the Count of Orgaz is about to be buried wearing his armor. This is a creation of El Greco's fantasy, and no sixteenth-century viewer would have failed to notice it. As is perfectly documented, during the Early Modern period the dead could indeed be buried dressed in accordance with their social status, but more often they were dressed in a shroud (as was none other than King Philip II himself) or in the habit of some religious order[16]. This was a required expression of humility. In any case, as far as I know, no nobleman ever elected to be buried wearing his armour, nor has a suit of armour ever been found inside a coffin.

Second, there are no women attending this burial: they are all men, and not even the Count's widow follows him on his last journey. Also, they all seem to be serious rather than mournful. There is no sorrow, no crying, absolutely no sign of grief drawn on their faces. A small number of friars are engaged in a silent dialogue, but the rest of the figures seem

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[14] Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory", p. 113.

[15] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, New York, 1958, p. 56e, section 129.

[16] F. Martínez Gil, *Muerte y sociedad en la España de los Austrias,* México, 1993, pp. 382-385. For the Middle Ages, F. Español, "Los indumentos del cuerpo a la espera del Juicio Final", in *Vestiduras Ricas. El Monasterio de las Huelgas,* Madrid, 2005, pp. 73-88. The use of the habit of religious orders is dated for Spain at the beginning of the fourteenth century in A. Franco Mata, "Iconografía funeraria gótica en Castilla y León (siglos xiii y xiv)", *De arte* 2 (2003), pp. 47-86, part. 56-57; *Eadem*, "Imagen del Yacente", *Boletín del MAN* 20 (2002), pp. 121-143. L. Vivanco, *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile: Ideologies of the Elites,* Woodbridge, 2004, pp. 149-151, documents two cases in the late fifteenth century of noblemen who died on the battlefield and ordered that they be buried with their swords (the Marquis of Cadiz and the Duke of Medinasidonia, 1492) but only one (Pedro Niño, Count of Buelna, 1435) who asked in his will to be placed in his tomb "vestido de falsopeto, y puesto el arnés de piernas, y los brazales y manoplas", p. 151. As documented by the same author, since the late fifteenth century it was increasingly frequent to be buried in the habit of some religious order (*Ibidem*, p. 149), increasing the contrast between their effigies dressed in the clothes they would have worn in life and the shrouds or habits that their corpses wore: ibid., citing: J. Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad en Burgos en el siglo xvi,* Burgos, 2001, pp. 170-172. For the more common use of shrouds during the Middle Ages, D. Alexandre-Bidon, "Le corps et son linceul", in D. Alexandre-Bidon, C. Treffort (eds.), *A Réveiller les morts. La mort au quotidien dans l'Occident medieval,* Lyon, 1993, pp. 183-205, part. 195-205.

completely disengaged, almost distracted. This feature departs radically not only from the expected representation of a burial –the Burial of Christ is of course the most important form in the Western visual tradition– but also from how El Greco himself had painted the response to or witnessing of a miracle: in the Healing of the Blind, for example (c. 1570, Metropolitan Museum, NY), the miracle's performance is rhetorically confirmed by a mass of people raising their hands in a gesture of eloquent surprise. Nothing of this is to be found in the Burial of the Count of Orgaz, where all the figures seem to be absorbed in a deep calm. This attitude becomes extreme in the closest of all figures to the viewer, that of the boy in the foreground –the "only" boy in the whole scene– a child who presents the drama to the viewer by pointing it out to us with his left hand.

The encounter with characters dressed in contemporary fashion, with their portrait-like faces, raises in the viewer a strong sense of familiarity, but this only triggers the opposite effect: that of estrangement. In fact the whole painting produces a strong and unequivocal experience of what Bertold Brecht would have called a *Verfremdungseffekt*[17]. This alienating effect is generated not only by the obvious presence of the two saints at the burial: in the words of the epitaph, "something wondrous and unique" (*admiranda et insolita res*). El Greco has also turned the whole scene into what Brecht would have described as a "shocking and distancing mirror of reality." This fact does not work against or instead of empathy, but in intimate but also dialectical relation to it[18]. Familiarity together with estrangement are two complementary emotions provoked in the viewer by the painting; they are two sides of one and the same coin.

This observation brings us to the next and no less striking aspect of the painting's "estrangement effect": its outdated, if not archaic, composition. There is a radical contrast between the naturalistic portraits of those attending the burial in the foreground and the painting's awkward, if not extremely conservative, division into two levels: the terrestrial and the heavenly. Below is the burial itself with all the figures displayed in a sort of relief pressed against the picture plane; and over their heads is the heavenly scene presided over by the *Deesis,* the triumphant Church and the choirs of angels. The two levels are connected only by the vertical axis marked by the angel who is gently carrying the soul –here represented as sort of amorphous pneumatic body– to heaven.

It would be difficult to summarize the long, rich, and complex literature on this aspect of El Greco's painting. Notwithstanding, when facing the paradox of its anti-naturalistic composition, studies tend to fall into two major categories. The first is comprised of "orientalizing" theories that explain its conservatism in terms of the painter's (past) Byzantine heritage, and relate it in particular to the icon of the Koimesis, painted in 1565, just before El Greco left for Venice (Fig. 3). The second prefers to see the painter as departing from Renaissance composition types but pushing them into a radical, naturalistic "modernity." Either way, El Greco fits

[17] E. Bloch, "*Entfremdung, Verfremdung*: Alienation, Estrangement", *The Drama Review: TDR,* 15 (1970), pp. 120-125. For a history of the concept see Douglas Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature. Tolstoy, Shlovsky, Brecht,* Baltimore, 2008, where it is analysed in dialectical relationship to a key concept in art history, that of empathy or *Einfühlung, Ibidem,* pp. 206-208.

[18] B. Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting [1947/57]", in *Brecht on Theatre, 1933-1947,* pp. 91-147.

[19] See, for example, G. Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images,* Paris, 2000. A. Nagel, C. S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance,* New York, 2010.

Fig. 3.El Greco,
Dormition of the
Virgin (Koimesis),
Ermouoli, Syros,
1567 ca./ Sappho
Painter, Bail-Handle
Olpe Depicting
a Funeral Scene,
ca. 500-475 BC,
Bowdoin College
Museum of Art

into a pre-ordained teleological account. The painting's non-conventional layout is either a relic from the past or a prophetic anticipation of the future; it arrived either late, or too early to enter the history of Renaissance painting. Several authors have recently challenged the historicist agenda of traditional art history, problematizing diachronic temporality as a fundamental component of what has been called the "anachronistic force of images": the capacity of images to cut through time[19]. This is one aspect of El Greco's painting. The *Burial,* however, is, in my opinion, both the result of this phenomenon and an example of exactly its opposite: a case of continuity as much as one of resistance. It is a performative act of memory, of course, but also one of selective oblivion[20].

I am not the first to reflect on the Burial's puzzling conservatism. On the one hand we have the just-mentioned literature referring to El Greco's early activity as an icon painter, an issue that I will revisit later. On the other, in an article published in 1981 Franz Philipp looked into Medieval Castilian sepulchres in order to explain the painting's outmoded iconography[21]. I believe the article pointed in the right direction, though my reasons are different

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[20] This urges us to consider the painting simultaneously from two different intellectual perspectives: that of the science of images, *Bildwissenschaft* or "visual culture", on the one hand; and that of the "history of art", on the other. In my view, rather than subsuming the latter into the former –history into science- as has often been proposed in recent years, it is more productive to keep the two approaches active but also distinctive, forcing them to enter into what I think of as a fruitful interaction.

[21] F. PHILIPP, "El Greco's Entombment of the Count of Orgaz and Spanish Medieval Tomb Art", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld* Institutes, 44 (1981), pp. 76-89. Philipp's argument has received little attention. The only exception I know is A. FRANCO MATA, *El Greco y la iconografía religiosa,* Madrid, 2014, pp. 44-49. The iconographic and compositional analogy had already been noticed in E. COLORADO Y LACA, "Un antecedente del 'Enterramiento del Conde de Orgaz'", *Estudios Segovianos* I, 2-3 (1949), pp. 476-478.

from Philipp's. In twelfth- and especially thirteenth-century Spanish sepulchres, the kinds of images with which the painting was forced to enter into dialogue, the canonical representation of the burial is that of a hero: still dressed in his armour, holding his sword, and wearing his spurs, the dead man lies dressed as a knight above his own tomb (Fig. 4). The scene of the funeral, underneath, shows his body mourned by figures displayed in a row. Both niche tombs covered with arcosolia –the imported French model of the *enfeu*–, and free-standing tombs in the form of sarcophagi –a typology particularly favoured in Medieval Iberia– share the same soteriological structure on three levels (Fig. 5)[22]: (1) the lament for the deceased –what the Greeks would have called the scene of the *prothesis*, the model from which these scenes ultimately derive, as we will see in a moment; (2) an intermediate level in which angels carry the soul; and finally, (3) the soul's ultimate destination, heaven, where the Virgin intercedes for the dead in the presence of Christ[23]. This is the same three-tiered composition shared by the Burial of the Count of Orgaz. Also, as in all these examples, the scene in El Greco's painting is aligned in the foreground, as if it had *rilievo* but no depth. These complex structures are responses to the development of what Panofsky famously described as a new "retrospective"

Fig. 4. Sepulcher of a Knight of the Family Tellez de Meneses, MNAC (Museo Nacional de Arte de Cataluña). Provenance: Santa María de Matallana (Valladolid). 1300 ca. (photo: MNAC)

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[22] See for these typologies R. Sánchez Ameijeiras, *Investigaciones iconográficas sobre la escultura funeraria del siglo XIII en Castilla y León,* Ph D. Diss., Santiago de Compostela University, 1993 (unpublished dissertation).

[23] An introduction in A. Franco Mata, "Iconografía de sepulcros góticos en Castilla y León", in B. Borngässer, H. Karge, B. Klein, *Grabkunst und Sepulkralkultur in Spanien und Portugal. Arte funerario y cultura sepulcral en España y Portugal*, Madrid, 2006, pp. 65-86. *Eadem*, "Escultura gótica funeraria en Castilla y León", *De* Arte, 2 (2003), pp. 47-86.

Fig. 5. Sepulcher of Alonso Vidal (d. 1288/89), Cathedral of Salamanca/ Sepulcher, Valladolid Cathedral. Provenance: Santa María de Palazuelos. 1300 ca. (photo: author/ Amy Chang)

attitude in funerary sculpture developed in the High Middle Ages: it included the introduction of the three-dimensional effigy at the end of the eleventh century, and the invention of figurative narratives that describe not only the hope for the afterlife of the spiritual body but also the fate of the mortal remains[24].

The Language of Grief, Ancient and Medieval

While Spanish medieval sepulchres coincide typologically with funerary sculpture north of the Pyrenees, they introduce a spectacular repertoire of images of ritual lament for which nothing comparable is found elsewhere in Western Europe. Gestures of dramatic bereavement are occasional in French Gothic monuments but they constitute isolated examples, never –that I know of- unfolding into narratives[25]. In the case of Spain, on the contrary, there is not only a great number of them concentrated in Western Castile, north of the Duero, but they developed into complex multifigure compositions which find no parallel in Europe.

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[24] E. Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture. Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini,* M. Warnke (ed.), New York, 1992. On Panofsky's immense project see A. Adams, J. Barker (eds.), *Revisiting the Monument. Fifty Years since Panofsky's Tomb Sculpture,* The Courtauld Institute, 2016.

[25] The type appears with the emergence of the funerary effigy in France (Philippe de France, d. 1235, Saint Denis). To my knowledge the afterlife of the motif in French funerary sculpture has not been investigated. For the French case see R. Marcoux, "La liminalité du deuillant dans l'iconographie funéraire médiévale (xiie-xve siècle)", *Memini. Travaux et* documents, 11 (2007), pp. 63-98. The typology has its roots in ancient art, but the gestural repertoire does not. Cf. M. E. Weller, "The Procession on the Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women", *California Studies in Classical* Antiquity, 3 (1970), pp. 219-227.

In the decoration of Spanish sarcophagi –whether of laymen or clergy– men and women are shown in the form of a frieze, with mourners aligned at both ends of the deathbed (Fig. 6). These elaborate funeral representations are dated from the middle of the twelfth century to the beginning of the fourteenth (ca. 1140-1320), when they suddenly disappear[26]. Unsurprisingly, however, they are absent from surveys of the topic such as Panofsky's otherwise still important *Tomb Sculpture*[27].

Mourners in these sepulchres display gestures of a sort of wild ecstasy, pushing dramatically the limits of physical pain. Some women, for example, are shown fainting, falling into the arms of their families as if succumbing in agony to an unbearable grief (Fig. 7). More often, however, both men and women are represented scratching their faces fiercelys or violently tearing out locks of hair in a sort of choreographed frenzy (Figs. 8 and 9). The former gesture can be read perfectly in some images of Alphonse X's *Cantigas*. The scene brings together different and even opposite topoi of ancient mourning: while the figure at the back covers his/
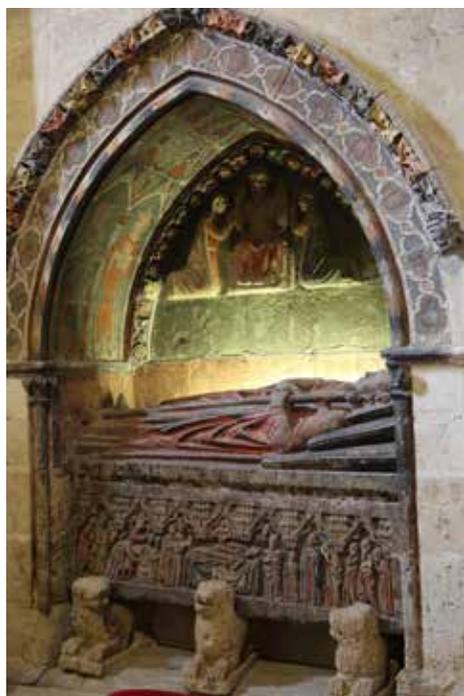

Fig. 7.Sepulcher of Elena de Castro, (detail) Salamanca Cathedral. Photo: author

Fig. 6. Sepulcher of Bishop Pedro (d. 1324), Salamanca Cathedral. Photo: author

Fig. 8. Sepulcher. Provenance: Santa María de la Vega. Museo Provincial de Palencia (photo: author)

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[26] See for the earliest examples E. Valdez del Alamo, "Lament for a Lost Queen: The Sarcophagus of Doña Blanca in Nájera", *The Art Bulletin* 78 (1996), pp. 311-333. And now S. García González, "Las exequias de Reinas e Infantas en los reinos cristianos de la Península Ibérica (siglos XI-XIII)", in M. García-Fernández, S. Cernadas (eds.), *Reginae Iberiae. El poder regio femenino en los reinos medievales peninsulares,* Santiago de Compostela, 2015, pp. 31-60.

[27] Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*.

Fig. 9. Tomb of Bishop González de Hinojosa (d. 1327), (detail). Burgos Cathedral (photo: author)

her face with a cloth, a sign of unbearable or unrepresentable grief[28], the rest of the figures rely on the opposite visual strategy: the young woman on the right is pulling out her hair while the one on the left scratches her cheeks until they bleed (blood painted with bright red pigment) (Fig. 10)[29]. This is the same gesture that Achilles performed at the deathbed of Patroclus in the *Libro de Alexandre* in the thirteenth century and in Juan de Mena's Castilian version of the *Ilias Latina*:

> … con las uñas desaze las sus hazes, e los sus todos cabellos con el polvo desfea, e rompe desdel pecho las sus altas vestiduras[30].

The other formalized gesture seen repeatedly in funerary representations is the tearing of the hair; it can be found across different media over more than a century. Described in

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[28] Pliny, *Natural History* 35, 73. Cicero, *Orator* 22, 74. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* II, 13, 13. On the Medieval afterlife of this topos see R. Marcoux, "*Vultus velatus* ou la figuration positive de la tristesse dans l'iconographie de la fin du Moyen Âge", *Médiévales*, 61 (2011), pp. 1-20. J. F. Moffitt, "Sluter's 'Pleurants' and Timanthes' 'Tristitia Velata': Evolution of, and Sources for a Humanist Topos of Mourning", *Artibus et Historiae*, 26 (2005), pp. 73-84.

[29] *Cantigas de Florencia, Cantigas de Santa María*, Códice *F,* fol. 81.

[30] J. de Mena, *Sumas de la Iliada de Omero,* Gredos, ed. Clásica, 1996, p. 169. Cfr. the *Libro de Alexandre* (ca. 1207-30):

> *Achiles por Patroclo fazié sobejo duelo,*
> *como si fues su padre o fuesse su avuelo;*
> *los ríos de las lágremas corrían por el suelo;*
> *dizién que avié Ector plantado mal majuelo*

Fig. 10. *Cantigas de Florencia, Cantigas de Santa María*, Códice F, fol. 81

Spanish with the verb *mesarse*[31]*,* it means not just to pull but to literally to tear out the hair. This mourning rite is extensively recorded in Castile in both visual and written sources. It was also practiced in many other areas around the Mediterranean since ancient times (in Egypt[32]

Tirava de sus pelos, rompiése las mexiellas,
con ambos los sus puños batié las mançaniellas
los griegos en sus caras fazién malas manziellas,
afilavan las capas, descosién las capiellas.
Stanza 649

A similar gesture is described in the funeral of Ferdinand III (*Primera Crónica General,* Gredos, 1977, p. 773): "¿Et quién vio tanta duenna de alta guise [guisa?] et tanta donzella andar descabennadas et rascadas ronpiendo las fazes et tornandolas en sangre et en la carne biva? ¿Quién vio tanto infante, tanto rico omne, tanto infançon, tanto caballero, tanto omne de prestar andando haladrando, dando bozes, mesando sus cabellos et rompiendo las fruentes et faziendo en su [¿falta una palabra?] fuertes cruezas?". For a context of these visual strategies see R. M. RODRÍGUEZ PORTO, "Greek Tragedy in Medieval Art", in H. M. ROISMAN (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Greek Art,* II, Oxford, 2014, pp. 627-636.

[31] "*Mesar, y mesarse. Arrancar los cabellos de la cabeça, y porque echan las manos a ella, con gran furia, se dijo assi, del verbo mitto*", COVARRUBIAS, *Diccionario* (1611).

[32] Y. VOLOKHINE, "Tristesse rituelle et lamentations funéraires en Égypte ancienne", *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 225/2 (2008), pp. 163-197. The ritual and artistic manifestations of mourning are concentrated in the Amarna and post-Amarna period and –in an analogous case to Christianity—also had to overcome a previous "firm belief in immortality [that] made it impossible to include songs expressive of pain and sadness": J. ASSMANN, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt,* Ithaca-London, 2005, pp. 113-119, 308-310, part. 114.

and Israel[33] as well as ancient Greece), and of course was made famous by Homer in the scene of offering locks of hair at the tomb of Patroclus (Iliad, XXIII, 144-155)[34].

Interestingly enough, some of these images feature narrative contexts that have strong connections with their ancient precedents –although I am not aware these have ever been explored. These appear around the scene of the Greek *prothesis,* the ceremony in which the cadaver was mourned in the private household before being taken in procession to its tomb –the ceremony called *ekphora*[35]*.* The *prothesis* might have been introduced already by the time of the Geometric style, and shows a flat representation of the cadaver surrounded by mourning figures[36]. It survived well into the Attic period and then vanished, although it went through important changes –perhaps as a result of the laws of Solon that, according to Plutarch, tried to restrain the "extravagance" of these ritual practices[37]. Whatever the effect of these laws might have been, precise gestures like the lacerating of flesh disappear in the Attic vase *prothesis*[38]*.* In a sixth-century vase for water (*loutrophoros*) at the Met, for example, women surround the dead body while lifting their hands over their heads; only one much younger girl, separate from the rest of the group, mourns her father (?) while crouching under his deathbed (Fig. 11). Women, men, and occasionally children still attend the ceremony, but now a clear gender division is established, with women presented as wailing and tearing their hair close to the dead body and men slightly distant, performing a distinctive gesture of raising their hands with the palms outward[39] (Fig. 12).

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[33] There are numerous passages in the Old Testament that forbid the practice: Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament,* London, 1918, III, pp. 270-303: Dt, 14,1; Lv 19, 28; Jer 16, 6; Is 22, 12. Amos 8. See also Calum M. Carmichael, "On Separating Life and Death: An Explanation of Some Biblical Laws", *Harvard Theological Review* 69 (1976), pp. 1-7.

[34] M. ALEXIOU, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition,* Boston, 2002, pp. 6-7.

[35] W. ZSCHIETZSCHMANN, "Die Darstellungen der Prothesis in der griechischen Kunst", *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Athenische Abteilung*, 53 (1928), pp. 17-47; J. BOARDMAN, "Painted Funerary Plaques and Some Remarks on Prothesis", *The Annual of the British School of Athens*, 50 (1955), pp. 51-66; D. C. KURZ, "Vases for the Dead, an Attic Selection, 750-400 BC", *Ancient Greek and related pottery.* Proceedings of the International Vase Symposium in Amsterdam, 12-15 April 1984; H. A. SHAPIRO, "The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art", *American Journal of Archaeology*, 95 (1991), pp. 629-656; T. J. MCNIVEN, *Gestures in Attic Vase Painting. Use and Meaning, 550-450 BC,* PhD.diss., University of Michigan, 1982, documents 80 depictions of mourning; E. BRIGGER, A. GIOVANNINI, "Próthesis: Étude sur les rites funéraires chez les Grecs at chez les Étrusques", *MEFA,* 116 (2004), pp. 179-248. For the Etruscans in particular see G. CAMPOREALE, "Le scene etrusche di protesi'", *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäeologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung* (1959), pp. 31-44; L. TAYLOR, "Performing the Prothesis: Gender, Gesture, Ritual and Role on the Chiusine Reliefs from Archaic Etruria", *Etruscan Studies* 17/1 (2014), pp. 1-27.

[36] M. PEDRINA, *I gesti del dolore nella ceramica attica (VI-V secolo a.C.). Per un'analisi della comunicazione non verbale nel mondo Greco,* Venezia, 2001.

[37] "Mourners tearing themselves to raise pity and set wailings, and at one man's funeral to another, he forbade. J. DRYDEN, A.H CLOUGH, trans., Boston, 1868, I, p. 189. B. PERRIN, *Plutarch's Lives,* Cambridge, Mass., 1914. (perseus. tufts.edu), translates, "Laceration of the flesh by mourners".

[38] But they are documented in the Geometric: G. AHLBERG, *Prothesis and Ekphora in Greek Geometric Art,* Göteborg, 1971, pp. 264-265, although no image is shown. The same is found in A. CORBEILL, "Blood Milk and Tears. The Gestures of Mourning Women", in *Nature Embodied. Gesture in Ancient Rome,* Princeton, 2004, p. 72.

[39] Cf. K. STEARS, "Death Becomes Her. Gender and Athenian death ritual", *The Sacred and the Feminine,* 1998, pp. 113-127.
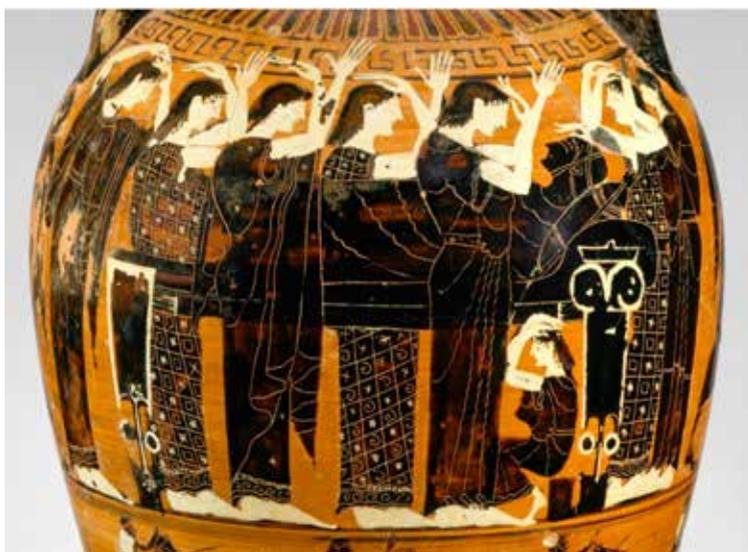
Fig. 11.
Loutrophoros,
late 6th century
B.C. Metropolitan
Museum, New York
(photo: Metropolitan
Museum)

Fig. 12. Phormiskos,
Attic. Museo Civico
Archeologico,
Bologna. Photo:
Museo Civico,
Bologna

Castilian funeral scenes belong clearly to this ancient Mediterranean tradition. But their gestures, while similar, are not identical to these Greek ones: figures lift their hands not over their heads but just to the height of their temples, making more clearly explicit that they are tearing their hair; they are frequently shown lacerating themselves, their hands violently scratching their cheeks with their nails; and finally, unlike in Ancient Greece, despite women's protagonism, in Castilian sepulchres this whole range of gestures is practiced equally by both men and women.

This striking continuity, of course, takes us to one of the crucial moments in art history's reflection on the temporality of images. In one of the most frequently reproduced panels of Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (Fig. 13), a relief from the Sassetti Chapel in Florence, the frieze fragment is shown inside a network of what Warburg famously called "antique superlatives of gesture," images whose travels Warburg carefully followed from Athens by way of Rom, to Tuscany and Mantua (Fig. 14). Although not included in panel #42, Warburg in his early Florentine years had already identified Sangallo's source for the Florentine relief in a Roman sepulchre representing the story of Meleager, which at the time was still in Florence[40]. The Meleager sepulchre, a myth documented in no fewer than two hundred Roman examples[41], provided Sangallo with not only the composition but also such individual motifs as the woman covering her face with her hands at the foot of the deceased's bed and, most famously, the old lady opening her arms in despair over the dead body. The latter image had a long-lasting tradition in Trecento Italy, beginning with the work of Nicola Pisano (Siena, 1265-68)[42]. In Mnemosyne's panel #42 Sangallo's relief is connected to other images extracted from Quattrocento Italy, among them one that obsessed Warburg especially in his last years: that of a turbulent

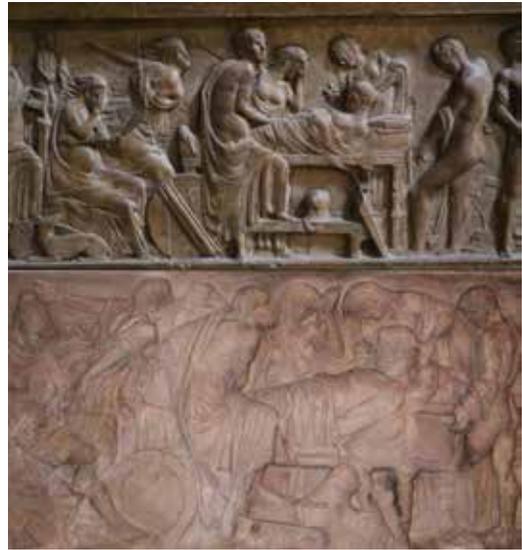Fig. 13. Aby Warburg, Mnemosyne Atlas, #42

Fig. 14. Tomb of Francesco Sassetti (detail), Antonio da Sangallo, 1485-90 ca. Santa Trinità, Florence/ Sepulcher with Meleager, ca. 180 CE. Private Collection, Milan (photo: author)

[40] WARBURG, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,* p. 261, n. 65.

[41] K. LORENZ, "Image in Distress? The death of Meleager on Roman sarcophagi", in J. ELSNER, J. HUSKINSON (eds.), *Life, Death and Representation. Some new work on Roman sarcophagi*, Berlin, 2011, pp. 305-332.

[42] More recently M. L. CATONI, "Donna disperata in movimento: peripezie di un particolare", in *Eadem*, (ed.), *Tre figure. Achille, Meleagro, Cristo,* Rome, 2013, pp. 47-81; *Eadem*, "From Motion to Emotion. An Ancient Greek iconography between Literal and Symbolic Interpretations", in H. BREDEKAMP *et alii* (eds.), *Bodies in Action and Symbolic Forms,* Berlin, 2012, pp. 99-120.

Fig. 15. Tomb of Bishop
González de Hinojosa (d.
1327), Cathedral of Burgos/
Roman Sepulcher, Achilles
mourning Patroclus, ca 160
CE. Ostia, Archeological
Museum (photo: author/
Archeological Museum, Ostia)

Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross in a famous bronze of the crucifixion by Bertoldo di Giovanni, an image that, according to Fritz Saxl –who wrote of it in the first issue of the Warburg Journal in 1937– Aby Warburg had described as a pagan "maenad"[43].

When inserted into this narrative, the Gothic sepulchres that Franz Philipp placed in relation to El Greco's Count of Orgaz burial acquire some interesting, and in my opinion also eloquent, resonances. Take, for example, the impressive frieze of the tomb of Bishop González de Hinojosa in the Cathedral of Burgos (Fig. 15)[44]: while the left part shows the scene of the burial,

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[43] F. Saxl, "The Maenad under the Cross", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 1937, pp. 70-71.

[44] For this sepulchre see M. J. Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria en Burgos,* Burgos, 1988, pp. 66-67 The biography of the patron González de Hinojosa (†1327) is surprisingly rich and would be interesting to place in relation to his sepulchre. Bishop Hinojosa had arrived in Burgos from the León diocese. He was personally related to the great historian Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada and had participated in two embassies that took him out of Castile: the first in 1317 to the court of Philip V of France, and a second in 1320. Beside his active patronage of the Cathedral of Burgos (including the construction of the Chapter House), Hinojosa is the the author of an incomplete Universal History, *Chronice ab origine mundi,* that circulated widely in its French translation. Vid. S. Aubert, "Les *Cronice ab origine mundi*, mise en œuvre d'une chronique latine", *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, 164 (2006), pp. 561-571.

on the right the dead body is being covered with a shroud. A dozen figures around him, both male and female, deploy a spectacular collection of mourning gesticulations, starting with those figures on the right that hide their faces in their hands, or those who cover them with expressions ranging from melancholic absorption to more theatrical grief. The comparison between this relief and a famous sarcophagus in Ostia, which once more shows Achilles mourning Patroclus –the model for those of Meleager, as argued by Luca Giuliani[45]– points to the existence of a still-to-be-reconstructed *Nachleben*, in the unquestionable form of the study of a Roman sarcophagus that would have been available to the artist but which, unfortunately, has not come down to our day. I am thinking in particular of the two figures in the left corner, but also the composition of the opposite two, which seem to echo those of a Roman sepulchre (obviously not this one in particular). The one figure that we do not find in the Gothic relief is that of the *Schmerzmänade*, the grieving maenad. Its place, however, has been taken here by one of the most consistent characters in Castilian sepulchres: women, but occasionally also men, who lift up both arms and pull out thick locks of their very long hair, making a disturbing image of unbearable pain[46].

No doubt the most spectacular example of this "Castilian" pathos formula[47] occurs in a sepulchre that has not received the attention it deserves: the painted panels of the tomb of Sancho Sáiz de Carrillo, originally at a remote church in Mahamud (Burgos, in Castile) (Fig. 16), and dated around 1300[48]. This sepulchre is unique in its use of panel painting. The sculpture

Fig. 16. Tomb of Sancho Sáiz de Carrillo, ca. 1300. Provenance: Mahamud, Burgos. Today: MNAC, Barcelona (panel paintings) and Cincinnati Art Museum (effigy). Photo: author/ Cincinnati Art Museum

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[45] Now as L. Giuliani, "Sarcofagi di Achille tra Oriente e Occidente: genesi di un'iconografia", in M.L. Catoni (ed.), *Tre figure. Achille, Meleagro, Cristo* (2013), pp. 13-46.

[46] M. Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art,* New York, 1976, completely ignores this Spanish material.

[47] There is an extensive literature. See most recently J. Knape, "Gibt es Pathosformeln? Überlegungen zu einem Konzept von Aby M. Warburg", in W. Dickhut, N. Winkler (eds.), *Muster im Wandel. Zur Dynamik topischer Wissensordnungen in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Göttingen, 2008, pp. 115-138.

[48] My reconstruction follows that of F. Gutiérrez Baños *et alii*, "Restauración virtual de las pinturas murales de la ermita de San Andrés de Mahamud: Un conjunto funerario castellano de finales del siglo XIII", *VI Congreso Internacional Restaurar la Memoria. Hacia un patrimonio sostenible. 2008,* II, Valladolid, 2012, pp. 595-602.

of the deceased –again holding his weapons in his hands– lies on top of a wooden coffin built out of painted panels, of which eight have survived. These are masterworks of Gothic painting. The artist has reduced all narrative to the single element of the figures, wandering in desolation around the dead body, each one dressed with a different geometric design, as if performing a ritual grieving dance. Panels represent two large groups of mourners, separated by their sex: adult women on one side, men on the opposite. The only exceptions are a young girl sticking out her head between the skirts of two women and a little boy climbing up on the shoulder of one of the men (a repeated element in most of the images we have been seeing) (Figs. 17 and 17 bis). The presence of children looks anecdotal, perhaps charming, but this would underestimate what I would call, with Ernst Cassirer, the "symbolic pregnance" (*Symbolische Prägnanz*) of images: their nonintuitive meaning[49]. The representation of children on adults' shoulders is far from common in the Western visual tradition. In at least three cases, however, the motif can be found in Greek black-figure pottery, and interestingly enough they all occur in scenes of *prothesis.* One is a *phormiskos* now in Bologna's Museo Civico (Fig. 12): here the third woman in line, her head veiled with the himation, carries a boy –most probably the dead woman's son– on her shoulder[50]. More famously, the great and also extremely original pinax by Exekias, today in Berlin, has a not too different detail of a boy carried by group of women

Fig. 17/17 bis. Tomb of Sancho Sáiz de Carrillo, ca. 1300. Provenance: Mahamud, Burgos. Today: Museu Nadional d'Art de Catalunya-MNAC, Barcelona (photo: author)

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[49] "By symbolic pregnance we mean the way in which a perception as a sensory experience contains at the same time a certain nonintuitve meaning which it immediately and concretely represents. Here we are not dealing with bare perceptive data, on which some sort of apperceptive acts are later grafted, through which they are interpreted, judged, transformed. Rather, it is the perception itself which by virtue of its own immanent organization, takes on a kind of spiritual articulation—which, being ordered in itself, also belongs to a determinate order of meaning... It is this ideal interwovenness, this relatedness of the single perceptive phenomenon, given here and now, to characterize a total meaning that the term 'pregnance' is meant to designate". E. CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Yale University Press, 1965, v. 3, p. 202.

[50] L. A. BEAUMONT, *Childhood in Ancient Athens. Iconography and Social History,* London, 2012, pp. 202-205.

who surround a grieving woman, the widow or maybe the mother of the deceased (Fig. 18)[51]. In both cases, climbing on grownups' shoulders underlines the children's short stature, and vice-versa: the magnitude of their loss is shown by their small size and weakness[52].

As for the mourners' gestures, they are no less indebted to a deep and ancient Mediterranean tradition. Women and men not only pull out the hair from their heads –in the case of men also their beards-, they also scratch their faces with their nails, leaving clearly visible traces of blood running across their pale faces. These are shown as two perfectly distinctive ritual gestures. In the men's panel the third figure from the left makes this clear: his right hand grasps a lock of hair while the fingers of his left hand scratch his face, leaving behind the traces of his nails. A similar action can be found in the reliefs of a wooden sepulchre from Santa María de Vileña, Burgos, with a close chronology[53] (Fig. 19). Traces of red pigment on the figures' foreheads show evidence of the original polychromy. As in the case of the church at Mahamud, one could say that mourners are painting their grief with blood on their own faces.

Castilian mourning figures speak eloquently of some of what Warburg called the "original words of a language of gesture" ("*Urworte leidenschaftlicher Gebärdensprache*") that

Fig. 18. Pinax, Exekias. Berlin (photo: author)

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[51] H. Mommsen, *Exekias. Die Grabtafeln,* Mainz/Rhein, 1997, p. 58, thinks the child is being passed from one to the other in order to show that the women are not his mother but the figure in the foreground [the foreground figure IS his mother? If so, "to show that his mother is none of these women but rather the figure in the foreground"]. I thank Ruth Bielfeldt for this reference.

[52] J. H. Oakley, "Death and the Child", in *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece. Images of Childhood from the Classical Past,* New Haven-London, 2003, pp. 162-194.

[53] I. Cadiñanos Bardeci, *El Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Vileña, su museo y cartulario,* Burgos, 1990, pp. 61-67, where it is identified with Día Sánchez de Rojas. Today it is found in the Museo del Retablo, Burgos.

Fig. 19. Tomb, ca. 1300. Museo del Retablo, Burgos. Provenance: Santa María de Vileña, Burgos (photo: author)

made their way from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Morphology, however, is just one aspect of the problem, one that, as Warburg himself had shown in his famous 1907 article on Francesco Sassetti's chapel at Santa Trinità, opens up a wider question[54]. The answer to this question must recognize not only processes of continuity, but also the consideration of –once more in Warburg's own words– "powerful forces of resistance to the organic evolution of style"[55]. In the following pages I will follow in the footsteps of Warburg's intuition, not to try to provide a solution to any of the "unsolved tensions" that, as Carlo Ginzburg for example has recently written, pervade his entire project[56], but rather to expand on an aspect of his work that has received little if any attention.

One puzzling element of the mourning iconography that we are seeing is that it met strong political, as well as ecclesiastical, hostility. This is of course not new, nor unique to Castile in this period. It is almost as old as the documentation of the lament itself in the Mediterranean: as we have just seen, legislation restraining funeral mourning can already be found in the laws Solon gave to Athens, and even before that, in the seventh century BC, the book of

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[54] A. WARBURG, "The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie. Domenico Ghirlandaio in Santa Trinita; The Portraits of Lorenzo de' Medici and His Household [1902]", in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity. Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance,* Los Angeles, 1999, pp. 185-221.

[55] WARBURG, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,* p. 249.

[56] C. GINZBURG, "Le forbici di Warburg", in M. L. Catoni, ed., *Tre figure. Achille, Meleagro, Cristo,* Rome, 2013.

Deuteronomy condemns these practices as barbarian and heathenish[57]. But it was Christianity, of course, that waged the longest battle against this ritual practice, starting in its very early centuries. In a book as beautiful as it is impressive, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico*, the Italian anthropologist Ernesto di Martino traced the historical roots of the practices of bereavement that he observed in Lucania, on the Thyrrenian Sea, in his own time backwards down to their ancient sources; but while documenting their transhistorical Mediterranean afterlife, Di Martino also called attention to a continuous and insistent resistance to these rituals. This attitude has its roots in the Gospels themselves, but it became polemical in the pages of Tertullian, Ciprian, and, most famously, John Chrysostom in the late fourth century, when the Archbishop of Constantinople described women tearing their hair and scratching their cheeks, only to compare what he considered a disgusting spectacle with the pagan dance of maenads:

> Truly. Here along with other evils the disease of women is revealed. For in the lament and in mourning they display themselves: they bare their arms, tear their hair, lacerate their cheeks … What do you do, o woman? … You pluck out your hairs, you tear your clothing, you give forth loud ululations, you dance around in a ring in the very image of the *maenads*.
>
> Do you not think you offend God? What is this insanity?[58]

As Di Martino already recorded five decades ago, one of the earliest, if not the earliest echo of this polemic is actually found in Iberia. The Third Council of Toledo, dated 589, forbade the rite of mourning and the singing of funerary canticles during burials, with the argument that those signs were contrary to the joy Christians should share in their hope for resurrection: *… funebre carmen quod vulgo defunctis cantari solet, vel peccatoribus se proximos aut familias cedere, omnino prohibemus. Sufficiat autem quod in spe resurrectionis christianorum …*[59]

The effort of the Church to limitn public demonstrations of grief is hardly a Castilian particularity: in a recent book Carol Lansing (2008) has shown that in the second half of the thirteenth century there was a dramatic shift in the understanding of the power of grief[60]. Her work, based on a case study of the city of Orvieto, documents extensively the making of new laws that restrained expressions of sorrow during funerals; spies were even sent to cemeteries as informants so that these crimes could be prosecuted. The chronological range of this study –from the last decades of the thirteenth century to the early years of the fourteenth– surprisingly

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[57] According to Plutarch, "… To offer an ox at the grave was not permitted, nor to bury above three pieces of dress with the body, or visit the tombs of any besides their own family, unless at the very funeral; most of which are likewise forbidden by our laws, but this is further added in ours, that those that are convicted of extravagance in their mournings are to be punished as soft and effeminate by the censors of women". Plutarch, *Solon.* J. Dryden, A. H. Clough (trans.), Boston, 1868, I, p. 189. There is a general view in A. M. di Nola, *La morte trionfata. Antropologia del lutto,* Roma, 1995.

[58] *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, LXII, xi, 1,2.

[59] J. Filgueira Valverde, "El 'Planto' en la historia y en la literatura gallega", *Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos* IV (1945), pp. 511-606, part. 522-523. B. Bartolomé Herrero, "Los usos funerarios en la Alta Edad Media: tradición cristiana y reminiscencias paganas", *Medievalismo: Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales*, 6 (1996), pp. 33-62, part. 45-46.

[60] C. Lansing, *Passion and Order. Restraint of Grief in the Medieval Italian Communes,* Ithaca-New York, 2008.

coincides with a shift in visual representations of the Passion of Christ in which a more dramatic emotional language was explored. The case of Castile is analogous in this regards: while a comparable concern by civic authorities is found in Castilian legislation, it coexists with a spectacular number of sepulchres that present the same gestures it was trying to extirpate. Written and visual evidence in Castile seem to tell very different yet complementary stories.

Particularly detailed are the *Partidas*, the legal code compiled by Alphonse X of Castile and reissued continuously in the following centuries. In one of several chapters devoted to regulating funeral and burial rituals, the *Partidas* give an eloquent description of the lament, interpreting it, as John Chrysostom had done centuries before, as a lack of faith in the Resurrection:

> Gentiles were people who had different beliefs. And among them those who thought that, when man dies, everything dies [with him]: the soul as much as the body … Some killed themselves with their own hands, and others held so much pain in their hearts that they went crazy. And the more moderate, would pull out their hair, and cut it, and lacerate their faces, cutting and scratching [their skin]. The devil made them fall into this blindness, bringing them to hopelessness. [*Partida* I, xliii].

For people "to break their faces" [*romper las caras*] in mourning for the dead and to disfigure themselves is something that the Church always considered inappropriate [*muy desaguisada*]. [*Partida* I, xliv][61]

Paradoxically, it is in Alphonso's *Cantigas* that we find some of the most intense representations of the practices that his own legal code would condemn[62], Moreover, an early –if not the earliest– illustration of a Castilian knight's funeral is that of none other than Alphonso X's brother. In the tomb of the Infante Don Felipe in Villalcázar de Sirga (Palencia)[63], the ceremony is populated with mourners of both genders, precisely those that the *Partidas* describe as an evil legacy of the gentiles (Fig. 20)[64].

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[61] *Las Siete Partidas del Sabio Rey Don Alonso el nono,* Salamanca: Gregorio López. Partida I, Ley XLIII, Ley XLIII. Cfr. Cicero, *Leg.* 2:59: *mulieres genas me radunto leve lessum funeris ergo habento.* Cited in A. Corbill, *Nature Embodied,* p. 75.

[62] Cfr. A. Arranz Guzmán, "La reflexión sobre la muerte en el medievo hispánico: ¿Continuidad o ruptura?", *En la España Medieval*, 8 (1986), pp. 109-124.

[63] For the dating and identification of the sepulchres see R. Sánchez Ameijeiras, *Investigaciones iconográficas,* pp. 199-210; *Eadem*, "Mui de coraçon rogava a Santa María: culpas irredentas y reivindicación política en Villasirga", in Á. Franco Mata (ed.), *Patrimonio artístico de Galicia y otros estudios. Homenaje al Prof. Serafín Moralejo Álvarez,* Tomo II, Santiago de Compostela, 2004, pp. 241-252, although her identification of the Infanta Inés Rodríguez Carrión has not been universally accepted. The alternative is that of Felipe's second wife Inés Rodríguez (or Téllez) Girón, as supported in Franco Mata, "Iconografía funeraria gótica en Castilla y León", p. 48. On these sepulchres see also O. Pérez Monzón, "La imagen del poder y el poder de la imagen. Alfonso X de Castilla y el infante don Felipe", in *Nuevo Mundo/Mundos Nuevos. Conflits dans le monde hispanique. Hétérodoxies, déviances et dissidence,* Grenoble, 2009, pp. 1-24.

[64] R. Sánchez Ameijeiras, "Un espectáculo en la Castilla medieval: las honras fúnebres del caballero", in M. Núñez Rodríguez (ed.), *El rostro y el discurso de la fiesta,* Santiago de Compostela, 1994, pp. 141-157; F. Español, "El 'córrer les armes'. Un aparte caballeresco en las exequias medievales hispanas", *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 37-2 (2007), pp. 867-905; A. Muñoz Fernández, "Llanto, palabras y gestos. La muerte y el duelo en el mundo medieval hispánico (morfología ritual, agencias culturales y controversias)", *Cuadernos de Historia de* España, 83 (2009), pp. 107-140; L. Vivanco, *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile: Ideologies of the Elites,* pp. 155-177. Overviews can

Fig. 20. Tomb of the Infante don Felipe. Villalcázar de Sirga (Palencia). Foto: author

This paradoxical coincidence is to my knowledge exceptional and demands attention in itself. Similar terms to those of the *Partidas*, however, are found in ecclesiastical legislation starting in the mid- fourteenth century, therefore coinciding with the last examples documented in the Kingdom of Castile; they continue with little variation during the fifteenth century and, as we will see later, even into much more recent times. In a synod in Toledo in 1356, both women and men are described –and at the same time criticized– for screaming and wailing (*voces horribiles …ululando*)– once again, as "gentiles" did in Antiquity[65]. In Jaén in 1368 Bishop Alonso Pecha (the famous confessor of Bridget of Sweeden) prohibited the *endechas* for being "strange to our faith"[66]. And in Cartagena in 1380 people were threatened with excommunication if they persisted in the practice[67]. But these cases are only a sample.

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also be found in: M. J. Gómez Bárcena, "La liturgia de los funerales y su repercusión en la escultura gótica", in *La idea y el sentimiento de la muerte en la historia y en el arte de la Edad Media,* 1988, pp. 31-50; O. Pérez Monzón, "La procesión fúnebre como tema artístico en la Edad Media", *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte,* 20 (2008), pp. 21-36.

[65] *…excessus tamen lugubris prohibetur, quia desperationem videtur future resurrectionis habere, illum ergo execrabilem abusum, ut cum aliquis moritur, homines et mulieres ululando per vicos et plateas incendant, voces horribiles in ecclesiis et alibi emittant, ac quedam aliam indecencia faciant ad gentilium ritum tendencia, que non solum fidelium corda pungunt, sed divine occulos maiestatis offendunt…* Toledo, Blas Fernández de Toledo, Synod (1356), in *Synodicon Hispanum. X. Cuenca y Toledo,* A. García y García (ed.), Madrid, 2011, p. 577.

[66] Jaén, Alonso Pecha, 1368: *Synodicon Hispanum. IX. Alcalá la Real (Abadía), Guadix y Jaén,* B. Alonso Rodríguez (ed.), Madrid, 2010, p. 537.

[67] "que cuando acaesçiere finamiento <de> algunas personas, varones o mujeres, e fizieren llanto los parientes o otros estraños por el o se rascaren los rostros o se mesaren los cabellos que los denuncien por descomulgados a todos los que lo fizieren": *Synodicon Hispanum. XI. Cádiz, Canarias, Cartagena, Córdoba, Granada, Málaga y Sevilla,* A. García y García (ed.), Madrid, 2013, p. 174.

As late as the beginning of the fifteenth century another ecclesiastical synod, this time in Burgos, condemns these practices in terms akin to those just seen:

> … because it seems that those who mourn for the dead, have no faith in the Resurrection anymore, howling and screaming dreadfully … and scratching their faces, and pulling out the hair from their heads … and this is what gentiles used to do [in the past], as they did not believe in the Resurrection … [Burgos, 1411][68].

While the *Partidas* chronologically match the visual representations produced under an equivalent patronage –unquestionably so in the case of the *Cantigas*–, that is not the case of local ecclesiastical legislation: there is no evidence of funerary representations of ritual lament in fourteenth-century Toledo or early-fifteenth-century Burgos. Images such as those carved on the tombs of Urraca Díez de Haro (Monasterio de Cañas, La Rioja, 1262), the family Téllez de Meneses, Matallana, (Valladolid, ca. 1300) (Fig. 21)[69], or Aguilar de Campoo, Palencia, (1301, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid[70] and of course Villalcázar de Sirga (Fig. 22) testify to a practice whose visual representations had come to an end while the Church still struggled to repress ite.

By the beginning of the fifteenth century the Castilian nobility had finally abandoned the convention of having scenes of mourning carved oon their sepulchres, but the violent tradition of ritual mourning continued to strike foreign travelers, who found this custom alien to Christianity, or to be more precise, "pagan." A good example comes from the English traveler Andrew Boorde. This surgeon and Cistercian monk with a degree from Oxford made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the 1530s.

Fig. 21. Sepulcher of a Knight of the Family Tellez de Meneses, (detail). Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya-MNAC, Barcelona. Provenance: Santa María de Matallana (Valladolid). 1300 ca. (photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya-MNAC)

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[68] "…parece que los que fazen llantos por los finados que desesperan de la resurrecion de lo que es por venir. Onde reprobamos el mal e aborrescido uso que quando alguno muere, los homes e las mujeres van por los barrios e por las plaças aullando, e dando bozes espantables en las yglesias e otros lugares, tañiendo bozinas e faziendo aullar los perros, e rascando las caras e mesando las crines e los cabellos de las cabeças, e quebrando escudos e faziendo otras cosas que no convienen. Las cuales cosas no solamente ponen enojo e escandalo en los coraçones de los fieles, mas aun ofenden los ojos de la divinal majestad". Bishop Cabeza de Vaca, 1411, in *Synodicon Hispanum, VII. Burgos y Palencia, ,* A. García y García (ed.), Salamanca, 1997, p. 108. Before 1500 we find similar prohibitions in Logroño, 1411 (*Synodicon. VIII,* Madrid, 2007, pp. 171-172). See on these and other sources collected in C. González Mínguez, I. Bazán Díaz (eds.), *El discurso legal ante la muerte durante la Edad Media en el nordeste peninsular,* Bilbao, 2008. A more general introduction to the problem is A. Guiance, *Los discursos sobre la muerte en la Castilla Medieval (siglos vii-xv),* Valladolid, 1998, pp. 68-77.

[69] Now at the MNAC (Barcelona). See J. Ara Gil, "Monasterio de Santa María de Matallana", *Argaya* 39 (2009), pp. 7-24.

[70] Inés Rodríguez de Villalobos. See A. Franco Mata, *Catálogo de la Escultura Gótica,* Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, 1980, pp. 112-115, who considers the work as from the "workshop of Villalcázar de Sirga".

Fig. 22. Villalcázar de Sirga (Palencia). Foto: author

The traveler complains about many things in his diary –food very often- but also felt disgust at how Spaniards celebrated funerals:

> In all these countreys, yf any man, or woman, or chylde, do dye; at their burying, and many other times after they be buryed, they wyl make an exclamacyon saying: "Why dydest thou dye? Haddest not thou good freendes? Myghtyst not thou have gold and sylver, & ryches and good clothynge? For why diddest thou die?" crying and clatryng many suche foolysh wordes[71].

El Greco's Lament

The story told so far is one of continuity but also of fierce cultural and political resistance. As art historians are trained to interpret images against the background of their social context, images of ritual lament have remained under the domain of medievalists. Historians, on the other hand, use images mostly as visual sources, and these are of little if any interest after the mid-fourteenth century. The funerary monuments we have seen so far, however, did not disappear from the urban landscape, but remained –many of them clearly dated– in church interiors. The funerary practices of which they were born persisted also, even if the Church had

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[71] A. Boorde, *The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge,* London, 1544 [Neudruck von Furnivall, ed., *Early English Text Society,* 1870, p. 200].

not given up the effort to eliminate them. El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* provides, I believe, an extraordinary opportunity to look into both aspects of this problem.

El Greco signed the contract for the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* in Toledo in 1586. He was then in his mid-forties. It was already twenty years since he had left his native Crete and almost a decade since he had arrived in Spain. By then he had mastered the Spanish language but still felt foreign enough to sign his paintings in Greek. The *Burial* was no doubt one of the major commissions he had received since his arrival in Toledo.

As we recalled at the beginning of this article, the *Burial*'s goal was to recreate the moment when Saint Stephen and Saint Augustine came down from heaven to physically place the body of the Count of Orgaz in his grave. According to the chronicles this had happened back in the 1300s –almost three hundred years before the actual date of the painting– at the time when many of the sepulchres we have just seen, so frequent in Castilian churches, were ostentatiously dated. By the beginning of the fifteenth century the Castilian nobility had finally abandoned the tradition of having scenes of mourning carved on their sepulchres, but the sepulchres of course remained, forming part of the interior furnishing of Castilian churches. Paradoxical as it may seem, while visual representations vanished, ritual mourning, in Spain as in many other parts of the Mediterranean, continued to be performed. This at least is what written sources, both legal and literary, tell us[72]. In fact, at the time when the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* was painted, the Counter-Reformation, ecclesiastical and civic pressure had increased dramatically in Castile. In 1565 –and this is the closest I can get to the date when the painting was made– an edict of King Philip II described these rituals, referring to the penalties decreed for centuries in medieval legislation on the subject:

> And regarding crying, mourning and other sentiments [*lloros, llantos y otros sentimientos*] that people used to do for their dead, what is enforced in the laws of this Kingdom should be followed, with the sentences contained in them[73].

That the Church had become anxious about these "popular" manifestations is proven by ample evidence. Among the abundant legislation some laws (Seville, 1604) forbade widows from following their husbands' bodies to the cemetery. The most radical ones (Calahorra, 1698) even prohibited all women from attending burials. As one late-sixteenth-century moralist (Hernando de Zárate, 1593) argued, mourning was the result of a particular "women's weakness" that had to be extirpated[74]. Laws, however, did not put an end to the practice. Literary evidence abounds in the Golden Age, from the Lazarillo de Tormes[75] to Quevedo[76].

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[72] G. Holst-Wharhaft, *Dangerous Voices. Women's laments and Greek Literature,* Routledge, 1992. Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, Ithaca-London, 1998.

[73] Philip II, Pragmática, Madrid, 20 March 1565: *Novísima recopilación de las leyes de España. I.,* Madrid, 1850, p. 15.

[74] Hernando de Zárate, *Discursos de la Paciencia Christiana,* [Alcalá, 1593. Cited in Martínez Gil, *Muerte y sociedad,* p. 183.

[75] "…venía luego por del lecho una que debía ser su mujer del difunto, cargada de luto, y con ella otras muchas mujeres, la cual iba llorando a grandes voces, y diciendo: 'Marido y señor mío, ¿a dónde os llevan? ¡a la casa donde nunca comen ni beben!'" *Lázaro de Tormes,* F. Rico (ed.), Madrid, 2006.

[76] Cfr. Francisco de Quevedo: "… and the moment they felt people were coming, they began mourning, six at a time, all women, who were accompanying the widow. It was a very solemn lament, although of little use for the dead.

Moreover, professional "mourners" were still hired at funerals in the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, the literary phenomenon of the oral *planctus* was still alive and well in Galicia in 1945 when the best study on the life and afterlife of this medieval ceremonial was written[77].

Old medieval tombs, and of course the striking images they bore, had become part of the urban landscape. At least one author, Juan de Mal Lara, writing in 1560s not long before our painting was made, explicitly refers to this fact. What interests me in this document, though, is not only that Mal Lara considered artistic evidence as historical, but that the "pagan" threat was now being expanded in order to include, and therefore try to erase, Spain's own multi-cultural past[78]:

> And it was in this way [the way of the Romans] that it remained to give burial to Christian Knights. These would be taken uncovered, dressed with those arms that they had, wearing their spurs, and before them those flags that they had won [in battle], and many other things gentiles would bring [...] Following them, you would see the mourning women [*endecheras*], singing in the Castilian language [*romance*] of his heroic deeds, and how he had died. All this was taken away by the Inquisition, as it seemed to be a pagan and Jewish tradition, and something that would do very little for saving the soul; although it is still possible to see on the decoration of many old tombs, for example in Salamanca, and in other places, even those mourning women [*endecheras*], everything carved in marble[79].

Juan de Mal Lara's text first identifies the burial of noble knights in their military armour, even wearing their spurs, as part of an old tradition, referring in particular to the evidence of monuments in the Old Cathedral of Salamanca which in fact houses some of the most impressive examples, all dated in the third quarter of the thirteenth century. (Figs. 5, 6, 7) At the same time, however, Mal Lara not only genders the practice of mourning but –as James S. Amelang has underlined in an important article– also considers women's weakness a contaminating influence of Jewish practice, for which one particular form of poetic lament, the *endecha*, *s* was considered in Spain to be of Jewish origin. And *endechas* or *cantos de muerto* ("songs for the dead") were in fact still sung by in Castilian by Sephardic Jews in Morocco at least until the 1950s. That fact, of course, does not make those poems any more Jewish than just Castilian[80].

El Greco's painting clearly draws from the tension, grown old by the late sixteenth century, between past and present, tradition and modernity, Church *decorum* and popular practice. His composition of course depends on a long convention in the representation of a burial,

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Once in a while one would hear the sound of clapping, like the one that penitents also make. And also long sobbings would be heard, accompanied by sighs, brought out with little conviction [*sollozos estirados, embutidos de suspiros, pujados por falta de gana.*]" *El mundo por de dentro*, in *Los Sueños,* I. ARELLANO (ed.), Madrid, 1991, pp. 288-289. See on sumptuary laws regarding funerals, especially after the Catholic Monarchs: C. EIRE, *From Madrid to Purgatory. The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain,* Cambridge, 1995*,* pp. 151 ff.

[77] J. FILGUEIRA VALVERDE, "El 'Planto' en la historia y en la literatura gallega", *Cuadernos de Estudios* Gallegos, IV (1945), pp. 511-606.

[78] See the very important article of J. AMELANG, "Mourning Becomes Eclectic: Ritual Lament and the Problem of Continuity", *Past and* Present, 187 (2005), pp. 3-31.

[79] J. DE MAL-LARA, *Filosofía Vulgar,* IX, 31 (Sevilla, 1568), cited in AMELANG, "Mourning Becomes Eclectic".

[80] M. ALVAR, *Endechas judeo-españolas,* Madrid, 1969.

but this iconography cannot be reduced to the "influence" of a "Byzantine" memory, at least if we consider that the memory of the ancient past also cuts through his early depictions of the Koimesis. El Greco's icon of the Dormition of the Virgin (Hermopolis, Crete, 1567 ca.), for example –the painting most often recalled when discussing the old-fashioned composition of the the Count of Orgaz's burial– follows a composition that maintains strong connections to ancient Greek protopytes, as becomes evident when we compare it with a burial scene in black-figure Greek pottery (Sappho Painter, *Bail-Handle Olpe Depicting a Funeral Scene*, ca. 500-475 BC, Bowdoin College Museum of Art)[81]. Notice for example the Virgin's body about to be but not yet completely laid on the bed, or the figure of the apostle on one end holding the body by her feet (partially lost in the Greek ceramic) (Fig. 3). From this perspective, El Greco's "Byzantinism" is not just the confrontation of two artistic languages fixed in time, but becomes a much more dynamic and complex problem.

The question, therefore, cannot be reduced to one of continuity either of influence or of tradition; on the contrary it is one of selective, conscious invention and reconstruction. To quote Jan Assmann for the last time, "The past is not a natural growth, but a cultural creation"[82]. In order to understand El Greco's painting, therefore, we need not only a theory of survival but also a "theory of forgetting."

With this in mind, let us finally return to the Count of Orgaz. The striking detail of the Count buried in his full armour localizes the episode back in a remote time, certainly not El Greco's time, when no nobleman would be buried in his armour. Fashion and style, on the other hand, bring the scene to the present. The painting's time strictly belongs to neither of these. In the terms of Aristotelian Poetics, the painting holds some strategic middle point between history and poetry: it locates the *storia* in a particular place and time, while simultaneously imagining that same episode as it would or should have happened [*Poetics,* 1451b]. It is at once both particular and universal. To bridge the two, as Aristotle recommended, El Greco employs his capacity to make things "plausible" [*Poetics,* 1452a] –*verosímiles* in Spanish. My reference to Aristotle is, of course, not random, since at the time of his death El Greco owned at least three volumes by the philosopher in his library: the Physics, the Politics, and the third one probably the *Poetics*[83]. These were all in Greek (he owned altogether no fewer than twenty-seven volumes in that language) and were part of his well-known strong intellectual background. It might not be superfluous to remember, for example, that one of the other Greek books in El Greco's library was the sermons of John Chrysostom, the same book in which a father of the church first criticized ritual lament as more appropriate to pagan *maenads* than to faithful Christians[84].

If history provided El Greco with the details of the story to be painted, the rules of poetry forced him to recreate it. If Gothic sepulchres inspired the images for its archaic invention,

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[81] I thank Alan Shapiro for helping me identify this source and finding a picture of it.

[82] J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination,* Cambridge, 2011, p. 33.

[83] F. Marías, A. Bustamante, *Las ideas artísticas del Greco (Comentarios a un texto inédito),* Madrid, 1981, p. 51, n. 34. On El Greco's library see now *La Biblioteca del Greco,* Exh. Cat., Madrid, Museo del Prado, 2014.

[84] "orazones de S. Ju° grisostomo", *Ibidem,* p. 221.

moral decorum and the power of art reinvented them. This is clearest in the representation of emotions. The Cretan artist kept the traditional composition of the figures forming the funeral procession perfectly orthogonal against the picture plane, just like a sculptural frieze with no depth or background. But he dramatically changed their emotional participation in the celebration of the burial: instead of showing grief or pathos, facial gestures range from serious and impassive to still, almost mystical peacefulness. These find a perfect correspondence in the slow, ceremonial movements of their hands, like notes of a gentle melody drawn against the backdrop of their black garments.

Nowhere is this more dramatic than in the figure of the child in the foreground pointing to the miracle with his finger. The young boy, from whose pocket emerges the *cartellino* with the artist's name and the painting's date, is most frequently interpreted as a portrait of El Greco's son Jorge Manuel (whose date of birth in fact coincides with that written on the piece of paper, but not with that of the painting). This might well be true, but the role of this figure in the Count's burial is certainly more than an autobiographical anecdote. As we have seen in many previous examples, the isolated figure of a single child accompanying the funerary procession was a recurrent component of the figurative tradition to which El Greco's painting refers, one that can be traced, once more through Castilian medieval sepulchres, back to Ancient Greek prototypes. A puzzling example that as far as I know has never been recognized comes from the tomb of Bishop Pedro Rodríguez de Quijano, d. 1310. (Fig. 23) The frontal of the tomb follows a very similar structure to that of Bishop González de Hinojosa, and might

Fig. 23. Terracotta funerary plaque (Prothesis), ca. 520-510 BC, Metropolitan Museum NY. /Tomb of Bishop Pedro Rodríguez de Quijano, d. 1310. Cathedral of Burgos (photo: autor)

Fig. 24. Death of a Young Girl, Sarcophagus, Roman, Musée du Moyen Âge (Cluny) Paris

have originated in the same now-lost prototype. It is divided into two parts: on the left we see the burial and on the right the mourning of the Bishop, what the Greeks called a *prothesis*. The figure to the left seems to hold the dead man's head, perhaps covering it with the shroud, while the rest of the figures encircle his body. At the opposite end of his bed there is a young character, probably a boy, performing an introverted gesture of mourning: bending his body toward the deathbed, he raises his arm to rest his pensive head on his hand[85]. The compositional structure, including this particular detail of the "melancholic" child, has its roots in Greek *prothesis* art (as in the black-figure funerary plaque at the Metropolitan, NY). A similar figure appears in some Roman children´s sarcophagi (two extraordinary examples at the Musée de Cluny, Paris, and the British Museum, London)[86]. The Roman examples are models of a peaceful "good death," which would now be appropriated and interpreted by these Castilian artists (Fig. 24).

Going back now to the enigmatic figure of the body at one end of the front row of attendants to the funeral of the Count of Orgaz, the ancient antecedents make clear that its function is not anecdotal but deeply rhetorical. As we have seen repeatedly, the presence of any little boy/girl –just *one* child– is almost a topos of this subject since Ancient times. In El Greco´s painting, however, the boy's serene detachment, together with his gesture, make his role completely different if not unique. The figure is no longer an altar boy or a *niño de la doctrina* helping at the ceremony, but what Leon Battista Alberti would have called a *festaiuolo* (*commentator,* in the Latin), the character on stage who intercedes between the painting and the audience, "inviting [it] to weep or laugh" –Alberti's words– with the rest of the characters depicted in the *storia*[87]. Except that no one weeps, much less laughs, in El Greco's painting.

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[85] See on the ancient and afterlife of this gesture Salvatore Settis, "Images of Meditation, Uncertainty and Repentance in Ancient Art", in *Gestures,* J.-C. Schmitt, ed., *History and* Anthropology, 1 (1984), pp. 193-237.

[86] J. Huskinson, *Roman Children´s Sarcophagi,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. See also on these David Noy, "'Goodbye Livia': Dying in the Roman Home", in V. M. Hope, J. Huskinson (eds.), *Memory and Mourning. Studies on Roman Death,* Oxford and Oakville, 2011, pp. 1-4.

[87] L. B. Alberti, *Della Pittura* [1435].

Fig. 25. El Greco, The Burial of the Count of Orgaz. Santo Tomé (Toledo). Detail

El Greco's *festaiuolo* not only mediates between the past depicted in the painting and the viewer's present, between history and poetry; he also helps to build what I have described as an effect of "estrangement" (*Verfremdungseffekt*) (Fig. 25). This is the result not only of the miraculous element of the story depicted but, as I have tried to show, of a much deeper reflection on what painting owes to history, how it can preserve its memories, but also how it fabricates them.