

## Ghosts and Ghost-belief in the Latin History-Writing and Political Poetry of the Early Roman Empire

(PhD- Thesis, Summary)

The PhD-Thesis is dealing with ghost-stories in the history-writers and political poetry of early imperial Roman literature. Under the term „ghost” I mean exclusively spirits returning from the other world, who appear to living people in dreams or visions. Former research about this theme is a good starting point for another examinations, but – in my knowledge - there is no extant monography concerning the ghost-stories specially in the works of ancient historians and historically interested poets.

Ghost-apparitions in ancient literature were classified into different types by J. Winkler and D. Felton. A new typology from a religious historical/demonological standpoint is the following:

1. Homeric type (*psyche, eidolon, imago, simulacrum, effigies, facies tenuis, levis umbra anima*): the shade of the deceased is like smoke and vapor, and untouchable (see Patroclus in the *Iliad*, or Hector, Creusa and Anchises in the *Aeneid*.)

2. *Manes*-type: the cult of the dead ancestors exists in Rome from early times, these ghosts do not appear like individuals, but go around collectively. In most cases they are interpreted as bad prodigies (see for example the *Parentalia*-story of the ovidian *Fasti* or the ghosts appearing after the death of Caesar in the 1st book of *Georgics*.)

3a. Gello-type: the *ahoros, biothanatos* and *ataphos* ghosts of this type are cruel, mostly able to kill people. They have been received their name of the aggressive *ahoros* girl, Gello in one of Sappho's poems (see for example the spirit of the sacrificed *puer* in the 5th epod of Horace taking revenge on the murder witches.)

3b. *Nekydaimon*-type: in necromancies with oriental features Gello-type ghosts become *nekydaimones* and fulfill the desires of witches and magicians (see for example the Erichtho-scene of Lucan and the witch- and magician-stories of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*). They look like they were living, because the witch or sorcerer binds the spirit to the body of another deceased. Hypothetically we order the latin *Lemures* in this type, too.

3c. *Heros*-cult is recorded in Greece from the Geometric age: the ghosts of *heros*-type behave mostly like *nekydaimones*, they can be often cruel and aggressive, but in cases of danger they appear in battles to defend their native *polis* (see for instance the heroes in the battle of Marathon, or the hero of Temesa demanding young girls in the decription of Pausanias' book vol. 6.)

4a. Guilty soul-type: they appear in the Philosophy of Plato and Poseidonius as souls tied to their body and forced to *metempsychosis* because of their sins. They fly around in the air and sometimes can be seen (see for example, the Phaido of Plato). Their name in the demonology of Apuleius is *Larvae*.

4b. *Larvae*, who were held initially as demons causing madness, they were imagined in imperial times as nasty, skeleton-like spirits.

5. The ghosts of *apotheosis* - type are actually no more ghosts, but human spirits, who become gods after their death (for example Scipio Africanus in the *Somnium Scipionis*, Romulus as Quirinus, or the spirit of Iulius Caesar fighting in the battle of Philippi against Cassius in the *Memorabilia* of Valerius Maximus). In the examined literature they look like glorious and magnificent gods.

In Roman funeral epitaphs we often read about *Manes*, who are begging for *parentatio* or are seeking revenge in case of disturbance of their tombs. They are mostly chthonic deities or spirits of the underworld, only in few cases are they ghosts of the deceased. From six examined inscription in two cases living family-members ask *Manes* for ghost-apparitions of the beloved dead (the literary antecedents of these motives are found in the *epicedia* of Statius' *Silvae*, or other stories about ghost-lovers, like Philinnion in Phlegon's *Mirabilia*). In two other inscriptions the buried dead prefers appearing to wanderers near his tomb.

Ghost-depictions are rare in Roman art, but some pieces presenting Homeric *Nekyia*, the killing of Klytaimnestra with the shade of Agamemnon, or the Creusa-scene of the *Aeneid* together with some Alkestis- and Protesilaus-sarcophagi need to be mentioned. On these monuments ghosts are depicted often with hidden head, their face are pale or not to be seen.

If we examine burial customs of Italy and the Latin provinces dated to early imperial times, there is a large difficulty to interpret tombs with *libatio*-pipes or irregular burials as proof of believing in ghosts. In fact, „apotropaic” offerings in shape of insects, iron objects, mirrors, etc. should be often interpreted simply as devices (occasionally status-symbols) used in the other world, or „empty” traditions without any religious superstition (for example Charon-*obuli* in graves). The curse tablets and magic puppets found in tombs of younger people (potential *nekydaimones* of the untimely dead) can be, however, connected with ghost-belief.

Most of the ghost-stories of Vergil, Lucan, Silius Italicus and the history-writers can be identified as unlucky warning *prodigia* indicating dangerous political conflicts in the Roman society. Except spirits of the *apotheosis*-type, all prodigy-ghosts are meant as warning signs to avoid or to revenge *nefas*-activity.

The function of the ghosts of Hector, Creusa, Polydorus and Anchises in the *Aeneid* is to help Aeneas search for a new home, their secondary mission is the „service” of Augustan propaganda: Aeneas must reach Italy in order to fulfill the plan of stoic *pronoia* about the world-wide rule of Augustus. Beside of Homeric and Ennian prototypes, ghost-scenes of the little-known Latin tragedy (Ennius, Pacuvius) play a great part in the formation of these Vergilian stories.

In the interpretation of the *Parentalia*- and *Lemuria*-story of the Ovidian *Fasti* we stress the similarity with the rituals of the inscriptions on the kenotaphs of L. and C. Caesares in Pisa, in case of *Lemuria* the Athenian *Anthesteria*-feast can be a supposed prototype. Although on the Augustan stone calendars we see *nefasti*-signs only at *Lemuria*-days, agreeing with some other scholars we do not accept the classification of *Parentes* and *Manes* as good, *Lemures* as bad spirits. The *pietas erga defunctos* has the same roots as the fear of the dead, the *Parentalia* rituals can also be interpreted as apotropaic in order to avoid ghost-apparitions. In the fragments of Varro the traditions about ghosts with the names *Manes*, *Lemures*, *Parentes* and the rituals they need, seem to be totally confused. Though the deified Romulus appears in Ovid's *Fasti* as magnificent god, the city-founder hero and his follower, Augustus have to face the crime of brother-killing, i. e. civil war.

The revenge of the dead Verginia against Appius Claudius *decemvir* in Livy's historical work is a warning example for each *tyrannus* to avoid godless crimes. This dramatic *topos* is, according to the research, not a structural fact in Roman history, but a narrative superstructure, however, historians of late Republican and Augustan times could have easily

identified the *tyrannus* with some politicians (perhaps Clodius or one of the *triumviri*) of that period. The ghosts of the unburied Romans in the Gallic wars (*Fasti Silvii*, Ovidius), the Roman senators believed to be spirits by the Gallic invaders (Florus), the „Gallic pyre” of the wrongly buried warriors (Livius) and the apparitions of dead Gallic soldiers could have been a part of a little-known literary tradition, which belonged perhaps to a hostile prodigy in the 4th century B.C.

In the *Punica* of Silius Italicus the main battles of the 2nd punic war were accompanied by bad prodigies, ghosts of the dead soldiers from Trebia, Ticinus, Cannae together with the dead Paulus, Gracchus; and Flaminius appeared, and finally Hannibal himself has been expelled from Italy in a dream. These scenes similar to those of Livy, Vergil, Lucan and Seneca fit well the poetic aims of Silius: he succeeded to find divine reasons for the most important strategical decisions of the Romans and Hannibal in the war.

According to a tradition mentioned by Coelius Antipater, Cicero, Valerius Maximus and Plutarchos, Caius Gracchus himself counted the story of the ghost of his brother, warning him to avoid the office of the quaestorate. The motif of this dream is a good example of the investigation of wandering *topoi* and their different interpretation by ancient history-writers.

In the 1st book of the Lucan's Pharsalia ghost-prodigies of the Vergilian *Georgica* were magnificently adapted to the contrary sense: when Caesar marched into Rome, the spirits of Marius and Sulla were seen at the camp of Mars and at the river Anio, as bad omina of civil war. The apparition of Marius'ghost was connected to a lesser-known tradition, to which the ghost-armies recorded in the Cimbric wars (Plinius the Elder), and the dream of Cicero (*De divinatione*) with the dead Marius should have belonged as well. Another hostile prodigy is the ghost of Iulia with the similar depiction, as her literary antecedent Cynthia in the IV, 7. poem of Propertius, and also the *nekydaimon* in the necromancy of the witch Erichtho, let alone the spirits of the dead soldiers at Pharsalus. The ghosts showed to Cn. and S. Pompey the temporary victory and the rapid fall of Caesar, the reason of civil war, whose „crimes” are dishonoured by the gods.

In the poetical tradition in favour of Caesar and Augustus the killing of Caesar is a hostile prodigy, a serious *nefas* disturbing the divine order of cosmos. The prototype of this motif can be found in the 1st book of Vergil's Georgics, and according to F. Dornseiff similar prodigy-series in Augustan literature were taken from the 3rd book of the Alexandrian Sibylline oracles.

In Augustan propaganda-literature we find the dead Caesar himself fighting on horse in the battle of Philippi against his murderer Cassius (Valerius Maximus), foretelling to a Thessalian man the victory of Octavian (Suetonius), chasing his killers with demonic anger (Plutarchus), or simply seeking for revenge in apparitions to his adopted son (Florus). The literary antecedent of these motives may be perhaps the *epicedion* held at Caesar's funeral, where the dead dictator wondered, whether he had been killed by his friends.

Not only the spirit of Caesar, but also their own *kakos daimon* (like bad self-consciousness) appeared to his killers, to Brutus at Abydos and Philippi (Plutarchus, Florus, Appianus) and to Cassius Parmensis after the battle of Actium. The death of these republicans happened according to the propaganda, because of the punishment of supernatural forces, but in fact their fall was caused by the lack of large political supports in the Roman society.

Examining the *kakos daimon*-story of Valerius Maximus we tried to find some data to the theory, that the oral and literary tradition about haunted houses, perhaps recalling the Polydorus-story of Euripides' Hecuba, already existed in the 4th century B.C., when Philemon wrote his *Phasma*. According to the account of Cicero (*De divinatione*) stoic philosophers often counted ghost-stories to prove the force of the divine *pronoia* through the *sympatheia* in punishing murders. From these tales and those of the *circulatores* constructed perhaps Valerius Maximus (or his literary antecedents) the *kakos daimon*-tale. The stories of

haunted houses appear with some modifications in the works of Pliny the younger, Lucian and Sueton, while the motif of *kakos daimon* become popular in history-writing of the 2nd century (Plutarchus, Appianus, Florus).

A hidden allegoric judgement about the principate of Augustus can be found in the ghost-scene of the pseudo-vergilian *Culex* dated to the Tiberian (?) era, many scholars suggest a depiction of Augustus in the shape of the culex-killing shepherd. However, the identification of the *Culex* with Marcellus or C. and L. Caesars is difficult, because they had not been killed by the emperor.

The next ghost in Roman history is Drusus Nero, the leader of the German war in 12-9 B. C., who asked the Elder Pliny not to ignore him in his historical work about German wars. Although we know little about that great work, the *praefatio* with this ghost-scene seems to be an *aemulatio* with Ennius' *Annales*. Plinian antecedents could be detected in the dramatic ghost-scene of Q. Varus (Tacitus, *Annales*) at the German war of Germanicus and Caecina, but the foretold defeat did not happen because of the tactical failures of Arminius.

In the historical tradition about Iulio-Claudian emperors we often meet the mentioning of the spirits of the imperial family's murdered members. After the death of Caligula the topically depicted tyrann was not regularly buried in the *Lamia*-gardens, whose guards were scared by ghost-apparitions. The oligophrenic ghost of Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis* of Seneca passes in his way to the underworld through the city and watches his own funeral. The function of this satirically negative *apotheosis* – perhaps written for the *Saturnalia*-feast of the year 54 B.C. – is the anti-Claudian propaganda of the personally hurt Seneca, and the stressing of the effort, that his pupil, Nero would be better emperor than his antecedent.

The spirits of Nero's victims in Tacitus' *Annals*, Suetonius' biographies and in the *Octavia praetexta* can be interpreted as hostile prodigies indicating the fall of the emperor, the anger of gods, and Nero's bad self-consciousness. Not only in the ghost-scenes of the *Octavia*-play, but also in the description of Nero's nightmares (Sueton) and portentous voices from Agrippina's grave (Tacitus) we find elements from ghost-scenes of classical Greek tragedy (Aischylus, Euripides) and Seneca's plays. The emperor himself tried to evoke his mother's ghost with oriental rituals, while *necromancy*, as reason of *laesa maiestatis*-processes was in the Iulio-Claudian era a crime with a punishment of execution.

The ghost of Nero himself appeared in a vision (rather in the fantasy) of the history-writer Q. Fannius as death-indicating prodigy. Ghost can be important elements in Flavian historiography: Q. Fannius and Pliny the Elder certainly dealt with them, Tacitus and Suetonius also followed a historical tradition hostile to Nero, which was formed in the age of Galba and the Flavian dynasty.

In the year of the four emperors, at the first night of Otho's ruling a portentous event was recorded, when the new emperor was afraid of Galba's aggressive spirit (Suetonius). This prodigy foretold Otho's untimely death. The ghost-stories in the histories of Caligula, Nero and Otho are parts of the *tyrannus-topoi* in dramatical history-writing added black colours to the depiction of the emperor's godless crimes.

The role of the examined ghosts in the Roman history-writing is the following:

- 1) the forming of the events of Roman history, or the attempt to do that
- 2) foretelling negatively (rarely positively) explained historical events without the attempt of changing them (the historical event is mostly connected to the death of a historical figure)
- 3) reaction to a mostly negative historical event (often the death of a historical personality), which already happened.

According to these criteria the examined mythical and historical events foretold or followed by ghost-apparitions are the following:

<u>Ghosts</u>	<u>Events</u>
Hector, Creusa, Polydorus, Anchises (Verg.):	Aeneas' wandering to Italy - 27 B.C. (princiate of Augustus)
Verginia (Livius):	Middle of 5. century B. C. ( <i>Death of Xviri</i> )
Paulus, Gracchus, Flaminius és soldiers (Sil.):	217-216 B. C. (battle of Trasimenus, Cannae) After 216 B. C. (Capture of Rome – did not happen)
old Sibylla (Sil.):	204 B. C. (Hannibal leaves for Italy)
Tiberius Gracchus (Cic., Val.Max.):	183 B. C. (Hannibal's death)
Ghost-armies ( Plin. The Elder):	after 123 B.C. (C. Gracchus' death)
Sulla's family (Plut.):	103 B.C. (Cimbric wars)
Sulla, Marius, Crassus, and others (Luc.):	78 B.C. (Sulla's death)
Iulia, Erichtho's necromancy, soldiers (Luc.):	49 B. C. (Caesar marches into Rome)
Unknown ghosts (Ovid. Met.)	48 B. C. (battle of Pharsalus)
Erichtho's necromancy,soldiers (Luc.):	44 B. C. (Caesar's death)
unknown ghosts (Verg. Georg.):	44 B. C. (Caesar's death)
Iulius Caesar (Val. Max. Suet., Flor., Plut.),	44 -30 (Caesar's and his murderers' death)
Brutus' bad spirit (Plutarchos, Florus, App.):	42 B. C. (battle of Philippi)
Cassius Parmenisis' bad spirit (Val. Max.):	42 B. C. (battle of Philippi)
Q. Varus (Tacitus):	after 31 B. C. (his own death)
Britannicus, Agrippina, Octavia (Tac.,Suet., Oct.):	16 A.D. (defeat in battle – did not happen)
Galba (Suet.):	68A.D. (Nero's death)
Ghost-army (Tacitus):	69 A.D. (Otho's death)
	70 A.D. (siege of Jerusalem)

The question of wandering ghost-scenes as *topoi* in literature is rather difficult, because in many cases we are not able to prove that one later working *auctor* certainly used a ghost-motiv of an earlier poet or writer, although such solution seems to be, because of *aemulatio*, an important „motor“ of ancient literature, very probable. We can therefore speak only about some important elements of the ghost-scenes appearing in the later writers' work, which could have been descended from oral tradition, or from works of lost authors as well.

The most important literary antecedents of ghost-stories can be found in the Homeric poems and in the classical Athenian tragedies (for example the Eumenides, or the Hecuba); the description and function of Homeric-type-ghosts in dreams and in visions are very similar to each other. Beside of the popular works of Greek literature, ghost-scenes of archaic Roman tragedies (Ennius, Pacuvius) were used in the oeuvre of Lucretius, Cicero, Vergil and Livy. The ghost-motives in the literature of Augustan age were varied by Valerius Maximus, the two Pliny, Seneca, and the great epoi of the 1st century A. D. can be regarded as literary treasure-chambers for Tacitus, Suetonius and Plutarchus (although in the *vitae* of Plutarchus there are also *heros*-type-ghosts to find).

Homeric and oriental necromancy-motives are popular in ancient literature, but they are not to be regarded exclusively as literary *topoi* of Thessalian and another sorcery: the evocation of ghosts was, from Greek archaic times, an important kind of oracle, many guests went to the excavated archaic oracle of the dead near Ephyra. In Roman imperial times there were also many curse tablets, binding spells and magic puppets recorded from the area of the empire.

Ghosts and spirits were popular elements of the stoic *pronoia*- and *sympatheia* – teaching (Cicero, Vergil, Seneca, Lucan, Silius Italicus) and middle Platonian demonology/psychology (Plutarchus, Apuleius), but played also a great part in the oeuvre of epicurean and cynic authors (Lucretius, Horace, Lucian). Ancient ghost-stories often moved the fantasy of the authors of the Middle Ages and recent writers, spirits from the other world became nowadays also an important element of exciting horror- or adventure-movies.