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The Rite of the Argei – Once Again

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In the middle of May, the Romans performed the ceremony that presumably has provoked the largest output of scholarly literature and the broadest variation of scholarly opinion in Roman religion: the sending off of the so-called Argei[1].

The evidence is well-known; well-known are also its uncertainties and contradictions. Varro gives the basic description: *Argei ab Argis. Argei fiunt e scirpeis, simulacra hominum XXVII; ea quotannis de Ponte Sublicio a sacerdotibus publice deici solent in Tiberim*[2]. Festus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Ovid add details: it was the Vestal virgins who threw the puppets into the river, while the pontifices performed an initial sacrifice (προθυσία), with the praetors and a selected body of citizens participating[3]; Dionysius is tantalizingly silent about why certain citzens "had the right" to participate[4].

The place – Rome's oldest bridge – and the main rite – the Vestal virgins throw puppets into the Tiber – are thus clear; both the date of the rite and the

1 An anthology of early explanations in G. Wissowa, s.v. Argei, *PW* 2 (1895) 689–702; for more recent bibliographies and discussions of scholarship, see J. Le Gall, *Recherches sur le culte du Tibre* (Paris 1953) 83–87 (up to 1950); R. Schilling, *ANRW* 1:2 (1972) 317–347 (1950–1970); D. P. Harmon, *ANRW* 2:16:2 (1978) 1446f.; Danielle Porte, "La noyade rituelle des hommes de jonc", in: Ruth Altheim-Stiehl/M. Rosenbach (eds), *Beiträge zur altitalischen Geistesgeschichte. Festschrift Gerhard Radke zum 18. Februar 1984*, Fontes et Commentationes. Supplementband 2 (Münster 1986) 193–211. – Add: G. Maddoli, "Il rito degli Argei e le origini del culto di Hera a Roma", *PdP* 26 (1971) 153–166; Blaise Nagy, "The Argei puzzle", *Am. Journ. Anc. Hist.* 10 (1985) 1–27; M. A. Marcos Casquero, "Los Argei. Una arcaica ceremonia romana", in: A. Bonanno/H. C. R. Vella (eds), *Laurea Corona. Studies in honour of Edward Coleiro* (Amsterdam 1987) 37–66; D. Sabbatucci, *La Religione di Roma Antica dal Calendario Festivo all'Ordine Cosmico* (Milano 1988) 101–103. 168–170; G. Radke, "Gibt es Antworten auf die 'Argeerfrage'?", *Latomus* 49 (1990) 5–19; id., "Römische Feste des Monats März", *Tyche* 8 (1993) 129–142, esp. 131–133.

2 Varro, *Ling.* 7,44.

3 Paulus (e Festo) 14 L. *Argeos vocabant scirpeas effigies quae per virgines Vestales annis singulis iaciebantur in Tiberim.* – Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1,38,3 τοῦτο δὲ καὶ μέχρις ἐμοῦ ἔτι διετέλουν Ῥωμαῖοι δρῶντες μικρὸν ὕστερον ἐαρινῆς ἰσομερίας ἐν μηνὶ Μαίωι ταῖς καλουμέναις εἰδοῖς, διχομανίδα βουλόμενοι ταύτην εἶναι τὴν ἡμέραν, ἐν ᾗ προθύσαντες ἱερὰ τὰ κατὰ τοὺς νόμους οἱ καλούμενοι ποντίφικες, ἱερέων οἱ διαφανέστατοι, καὶ σὺν αὐτοῖς αἱ τὸ ἀθάνατον πῦρ διαφυλάττουσαι παρθένοι στρατηγοί τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πολιτῶν οὓς παρεῖναι ταῖς ἱερουργίαις θέμις εἴδωλα μορφαῖς ἀνθρώπων εἰκασμένα, τριάκοντα τὸν ἀριθμὸν, ἀπὸ τῆς ἱερᾶς γεφύρας βάλλουσιν εἰς τὸ ῥεῦμα τοῦ Τεβέριος, Ἀργείους αὐτὰ καλοῦντες.

4 *Op. cit.* τῶν ἄλλων πολιτῶν οὓς παρεῖναι ταῖς ἱερουργίαις θέμις. There must have been an exclusion of many citizens for reasons unknown.

number of the puppets are debated. Dionysius dates it unambiguously to the Ides of May. Ovid's entry for what the editions call May 14 begins as follows[5]:

Idibus ora prior stellantia tollere Taurum
indicat ...

He takes the rising of Taurus as starting point for telling the myth of Europa. Usually, *prior* is taken to mean the day before the Ides of May; Ovid thus would contradict Dionysius by placing the rite on May 14. There is no corroborative evidence for either date: the stone calendars don't contain the festival, for unclear reasons, but they give May 14 the letter F, May 15 NP. Plutarch is frustratingly vague: he dates the Argei "around the full-moon of May", τοῦ Μαίου μηνὸς περὶ τὴν πανσέληνον[6]. Ovid's date presents two additional problems – the character (*fastus*) of a day whose rite was perceived as purificatory and nefast, as Plutarch implies[7], and the rarity that a festival was held on an even, not an odd day.

A closer look at Ovid's text, though, might help clarify the issue[8]. The two distichs immediately before the passage on the *argei* are dedicated to the Pleiades, and they run[9]:

Pliadas aspicies omnes totumque sororum
agmen, ubi ante Idus nox erit una super:
tum mihi non dubiis auctoribus incipit aestas,
et tepidi finem tempora veris habent.

We deal with the night before May 14; when Ovid in v. 603 continues with *prior*, it is natural to construe this adjective with the preceding *nox* and understand "the night (immediately) before the Ides", since he deals with constellations. When then in v. 622, after the myth of Europa, he makes the transition to the argei with *Tum quoque*, it is more natural to understand this as referring to May 15[10]. The date then coincides with Dionysius' and falls, unspectacularly, on an odd day.

As to the number of the puppets, Varro gives twenty-seven, Dionysius thirty[11]; other sources again are silent. Any decision depends on the interpretation of another long and famous passage where Varro gives a list of the shrines or chapels which were called *Argea* or *Argei* as well[12]; he refers to writings about

5 Ov. *Fasti* 5,603f.
6 Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 32, 272 B.
7 Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 86, 284 F, see below n. 57.
8 Thus also D. P. Harmon, *op. cit.* (above n. 1) 1448f.; D. Porte, *op. cit.* (above n. 1) 198f. (with some hesitations); D. Sabbatucci, *op. cit.* (above n. 1) 167f.
9 Ibid. 599–602.
10 Thus G. Radke, *Latomus* 49 (1990) 9.
11 Varro, *Ling.* 7,44, cf. 5,45 (next note); Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1,38,3.
12 Varro, *Ling.* 5,45f. *reliqua urbis loca olim discreta, cum Argeorum sacraria septem et viginti in [quattuor] partis urbis sunt disposita. Argeos dictos putant a principibus, qui cum Hercule Argivo venerunt Romam et in Saturnia subsederunt.*

the *Sacra Argeorum*[13] or the *Argeorum Sacrificia* as his source[14]. He lists the shrines by their four regions, beginning with the Suburra[15], after which follow the Esquiline[16], the third region with, among others, the Viminal and Quirinal hills[17], and the fourth with the Palatine as center[18]. In each region he mentions some shrines, but not all of them; nevertheless, invariably the last shrine mentioned is the sixth one, *sexticeps*. If this means that there were in each region only six shrines, they would add up to twenty-four – and create a problem: Varro began his report by stating that there were twenty-seven shrines. Scholars thus have either corrected this number to twenty-four, which could be easy on palaeographic grounds[19], or they have assumed that Varro did not mention all existing shrines. To insist on twenty-seven made sense, once one assumed that there were twenty-seven mannequins called *argei* as well, as Varro says later on[20], provided the two sets of *argei*, the shrines and the chapels, were related to each other.

So far the rite. There are numerous ancient explanations which deserve attention; as usual, ancient aitia tell us at least something about ancient perception of a rite[21].

The oldest story is cited in Macrobius, after one Epicadius, a freedman of Sulla[22]. According to him, the rite had been introduced by Heracles when he passed through Rome: having built a first bridge which later turned into the Pons Sublicius, Heracles threw as many dolls into the Tiber as he had lost companions on his travels; the river and then the sea should carry these bodies home. The rite thus aims at propitiating the ghosts of Heracles' Argive companions: *Argei* is understood as meaning the inhabitants of the Argolis, and the mannequins are seen as representing absent human bodies.

Both assumptions are widespread in the ancient sources. Varro gives no explanation whatsoever, when he talks about the puppets. Dionysius explains the rite as having developed out of a human sacrifice to Saturnus (the Aborigines used to fetter their victims' hand and feet and then throw them into the water); when Heracles passed, he taught them to replace this with the sacrifice of the

13 *Ling.* 5,50.
14 Ibid. 52.
15 Ibid. 46–48.
16 Ibid. 49f.
17 Ibid. 49f.
18 Ibid. 53f.
19 Under the assumption that XXIIII was misread to XXUII; the Laurentianus, though, writes words, not numerals, in contrast to *Ling.* 7,44, see next note.
20 *Ling.* 7,44 *simulacra hominum XXVII.*
21 See my "Römische Kultaitia und die Konstruktion religiöser Vergangenheit", in: M. Flashar/H.-J. Gehrke/E. Heinrich (eds), *Retrospektive. Konzepte von Vergangenheit in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (München 1996) 125–136.
22 Macr. *Sat.* 1,11,47.

Argei[23]. A similar story seems to be present in Festus: he explains the proverb *sexagenarios de ponte* with a story how it had originated in the custom that the aborigines threw the sixty-year-old men from a bridge as sacrifice to Dis Pater; Heracles abolished it and replaced it by the sacrifice of rush mannequins[24]. Another explanation in the same passage seems to talk about an Argive ambassador in Rome who died in Rome and in whose stead the priests sent rush puppets down the river and the sea back to his homeland[25]. A third story combines the bridge rite into the shrines: the text talks about a son who hid his elderly father from the fate of being sacrificed when Rome suffered from a famine after the destruction by the Gauls. It explains the shrines: they commemorate the different hiding places of the father and were called *arcea*, hiding places[26].

Ovid, as usual, has a long list of explanations. He starts with the human sacrifice to Saturnus upon the orders of Jupiter; again Heracles replaces the victims by puppets, *stramineos Quirites*[27]. He then adds the explanation from the proverb *sexagenarii de ponte* without, however, explaining how the old men were transformed into mannequins[28]. Finally, he has the Tiber himself give the correct explanation, a variation of the story in Dionysius: when Heracles passed through Rome, his companions stayed behind. One of them, touched by homesickness, wished his corpse to be thrown into the river in the hope to be carried finally home. But the heirs did not wish to neglect the ordinary sepulcral rites and threw a rush puppet into the river instead[29]. Plutarch finally, in the 32th Roman Question, adduces first the human sacrifices by the Aborigines which then Heracles abolished, and he specifies that the victims were Greeks or, as they were called at that time, Argives[30].

23 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1,38,2. – The same story pattern appears in the etiology of the Saturnalia, Macr. *Sat.* 1,7,28–31, after Varro.

24 Festus 450 L. s.v. *Sexagenarios* [*de ponte* ---] *cuius causam mani*[---]*m qui incoluerint* [---] *hominem sexaginta*[---]*re Diti patri quot*[*annis*---] *quod facere eos de* [--- *Her*?]culis, sed religio [---] *scirpeas hominum ef*[*figies*---] *modo mittere* [---]*t morante in Italia ...*

25 Ibid. p. 450,36 *legatum quondam Arga*[*eum* ---]*ssi Romae moratum esse; is ut* [*diem obieri*]*t* (Scaliger) *institutum a sacerdotibus, ut* [----] *scirpea ex omnibus, cumque publicae* [------*nu*]*ntiavisset, per flumen ac mare in patriam remitteretur.*

26 Ibid. p. 452.

27 *Fasti* 5,631. – One should not overrate the fact that Ovid talks about two human victims only; it is no indication that he thought only of two mannequins, pace Marcos Casquero, *op. cit.* (above n. 1) 44.

28 *Fasti* 5,633f. – The twist that the *iuvenes* wished to vote alone, however, points to the more common explanation of the proverb from the voting bridge, Festus s.v. *Sexagenarii* p. 452,14 (*ploratissimum illud*).

29 *Fasti* 5,639–660.

30 Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 32, 272 B: Διὰ τί τοῦ Μαίου μηνὸς περὶ τὴν πανσέληνον ἀπὸ τῆς ξυλίνης γεφύρας εἴδωλα ῥιπτοῦντες ἀνθρώπων εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν Ἀργείους τὰ ῥιπτόμενα καλοῦσιν; ἢ τὸ παλαιὸν οἱ περὶ τὸν τόπον οἰκοῦντες βάρβαροι τοὺς ἁλισκομένους Ἕλληνες οὕτως ἀπώλλυσαν; Ἡρακλῆς δὲ θαυμασθεὶς ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἔπαυσε μὲν τὴν ξενοκτονίαν.

The stories are numerous, but they all share the basic idea that the rush puppets in human shape replace real humans. These humans were either victims of human sacrifice current in an early time, when the Aborigines lived in Latium, or they were people who had died abroad – the Argives who accompanied Heracles, or a historical Argive ambassador. In both cases, the point of throwing them (or the puppets) into the river is to make certain that they were carried away. Myths about former human sacrifices who then were replaced by the one rite current in historical times are widespread in Greek and Roman etiology[31]. They tend to respond to an atmosphere of anomia and of uncanniness in these rites[32]; we shall presently see how this same atmosphere surrounded the bridge rite.

The other set of myths, where the mannequins are replacing dead human bodies, is less common and deserves more attention. The underlying assumption (that an artificial body, a puppet or statue, replaces an invisible body) is found in some Greek rituals and sepulcral contexts; there, the rites concern either missing bodies or ghosts[33].

Both sets of aitia reappear in the stories about the shrines. Festus, who calls them *Argea*, explains them as the graves of famous Argives[34]; the same must be true for Varro's explanation which derives their institution from Hercules' Argive companions who stayed behind[35]: this is essentially the explanation Ovid judged the correct one for the mannequins. The other theme, the puppets as replacing a former human sacrifice, appears in the passage of Festus on the proverb *sexagenarios de ponte* in which he combines the mannequins and the shrines. Thus, the shrines are associated with the same two etiological themes as the mannequins.

This grants the connection between shrines and puppets. Our knowledge of the rites which were held there, on March 16 and 17, has to rely on Ovid only; the poet only says *itur ad Argeos* and adds "their page will tell who they are", clearly referring to the May rite[36]; his wording implies that the *argei*, the mannequins, were visited in their shrines during those two days in March. If this is so, the number of mannequins and the number of shrines should be identical – twenty-seven in both cases, as Varro said.

31 Intense work has been done on the Greek side, see A. Henrichs, "Human sacrifice in Greek religion. Three case studies", in: *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité*, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 27 (Genève 1981) 195–235; D. D. Hughes, *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (London 1991); P. Bonnechère, *Le sacrifice humain en Grèce ancienne*, Kernos Supplément 3 (Athens/Liège 1994).

32 See my *Nordionische Kulte* (Rome 1985) 78–80. 414f.

33 J.-P. Vernant, "Figuration de l'invisible et catégorie psychologique du double: le colossos", in: *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* 2 (Paris 1965) 65–78.

34 Festus, P. 18 L. *Argea loca Romae appellantur, quod in his sepulti essent quidam Argivorum illustres viri.*

35 Varro, *Ling.* 5,45.

36 Ov. *Fasti* 3,791 *itur ad Argeos (qui sint sua pagina dicet).*

Scholars usually went further than this cautious assumption. They assumed that in March the Romans performed a complex procession rite in which they carried the 27 mannequins into the 27 shrines, from where they brought them back on May 15 and threw them into the river. No ancient testimony says so, and Ovid, if read closely, rather contradicts it: in March, one went *ad argeos – qui sint, sua pagina dicet.* He thus means the mannequins already in March; they must have been in their shrines at that time[37]. We do not know what there went on there in March; if the texts cited by Varro are reliable, we have to assume *sacrificia*, whatever they were[38].

If the aitia regard the rite as old, they do the same for the shrines: they figure among the religious institutions of King Numa[39]. This just means that shrines and ritual were understood, in late Republican time, as fundamental parts of Roman state religion. This should not surprise us: the list of the participants in Dionysius, for whatever reasons the citizens were chosen, confirms this.

So far the ancient evidence with its problems and some solutions in order to reconstruct the ritual. The main question, of course, has always been: what does all of this mean?

Answers have been offered, as we saw, by several ancient authors. Modern scholars did not hesitate to tackle the question as well, from the early 19th century onwards[40]. The modern answers were even more at variance with each than the ancient ones, but many of them, especially in this century, offered as a solution either human sacrifice or purification or, more rarely, the combination of the two in the form of a scapegoat ritual. There were more adventurous ideas, of course; Georg Wissowa who in 1896 thought that the rite commemorated the ritual killing of 27 Greek captives at some time between the First and the Second Punic Wars was only the most eminent scholar with a rather unusual solution[41] – Warde Fowler immediately reacted in widely Frazerian terms[42]. Both purification and human sacrifice could have very different aims. The human sacrifice was thought to atone to the Tiber for building the first bridge[43], or to be

37 The only scholar to see this was Radke, *opp. citt.* (above n. 1).

38 See above n. 12.

39 Liv. 1,21,5 *multa alia sacrificia locaque sacris faciendis quae Argeos pontifices vocant dedicavit*; cf. already Enn. *Ann.* 120f. *mensas constituit idemque ancilia <primu>s | libaque fictores argeos et tutulatos.*

40 See note 1.

41 *Op. cit.* (above n. 1); see also his *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Religion und Sprachgeschichte* (München 1904) 211–219.

42 W. Warde Fowler, *ClRev* 16 (1902) 115–119; see his *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* (London 1911) 54f. 321f.

43 J. G. Frazer, *The Fasti of Ovid* IV (Oxford 1929) 74–79. – Already J. Hartung, *Die Religion der Römer* 2 (Erlangen 1836) 103–106 saw them as human sacrifices to the river god, as did J. Toutain, "Les sacrifices humains et le culte des divinités fluviales", in: *Actes du Congrès International d'Histoire des Religions* (1923) 2 (Paris 1923) 156–162, and J. Hallett, "Over troubled waters", *TAPA* 101 (1970) 219–227. So much for originality in such an often discussed topic.

a magical rain ritual[44] or a symbolical repetition of drowning in order to regularly appease the souls of those who had died from drowning[45]. Purification, on the other hand, was sometimes understood very literally: one scholar thought that the Vestal Virgins would get rid of the straw from preparing the *mola salsa* a couple of days before[46], while another understood the rite as the disposal of the old thatched augural huts[47]. The scapegoat interpretation finally was hinted at by Georg Dumézil[48] and more elaborately proposed by Marcos Casquero[49]. Inevitably, etymologies for *argei* were thought up as well; the two most recent ones propose a connection with *argilla*, transforming Ovid's "Romans of straw" into clay figurines[50], or with Greek ἀρχαῖος in the sense of 'initial', seeing the rite as purification for a new beginning[51]. In both cases, the etymologies are circular – they are used in order to then understand the aim of the rite.

Some points, though, have become clear in the past discussion. The most important one: for a Roman, to throw something into the Tiber was an act of disposal, mostly in the sense of cleaning and purification. On June 15, the Vestals throw the refuse (*stercus*) from their sanctuary into the Tiber[52]; after the deposition of Tarquinius Superbus, they mowed his fields on the Campus Martius and threw the harvest into the Tiber, since they did not want to use it[53]; a *parricida*, a monstruous being acting against the most basic human laws, was thrown into the river and drowned[54]. This goes together with the more widespread custom of disposing with the remnants of cathartic rituals by either carrying them into the mountains or throwing them into rivers or the sea[55]; the Greek scapegoats were either led over the borders of the city-state or, at least in myth, thrown over a cliff into the sea[56]. Basically, the drowning of the rush mannequins thus is a cathartic ritual. Plutarch confirms this: when answering the question why Romans did not marry in May, he refers to the ritual of the *Argei* as "the most important Roman cathartic ritual"[57].

44 W. Warde Fowler, *Roman Festivals in the Period of the Republic* (London 1899) 120.
45 D. Porte, *op. cit.* (above n. 1); her arguments rely on a one-sided reading of Cic. *Leg.* 2,57.
46 Lucy Holland, *Janus and the Bridge* (Philadelphia 1961) 314–334.
47 R. E. A. Palmer, *The Archaic Community of the Romans* (Cambridge 1970) 84–97.
48 G. Dumézil, *La religion romaine archaïque* (Paris 1972) 448–450.
49 See above n. 1.
50 Danièle, Porte, *op. cit.* (see above n. 1).
51 G. Radke, *Latomus* (see above n. 1).
52 Ov. *Fasti* 6,713f.
53 Liv. 2,5,1–4; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 5,13; Plut. *Publ.* 8,1–5; cp. M. Besnier, *L'île Tibérine dans l'antiquité* (Paris 1902) 15–31.
54 J. Le Gall, *op. cit.* (above n. 1) 83–95.
55 Ps.-Hippoc. *Morb. sacr.* 1,42 G; cp. R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford 1983) 210. 230.
56 See J. N. Bremmer, "Scapegoat rituals in ancient Greece", *HSCP* 87 (1983) 299–320.
57 Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 86, 284 F Διὰ τί τοῦ Μαίου μηνὸς οὐκ ἄγονται γυναῖκες; [...] ἢ ὅτι τῶι μηνὶ τούτωι τὸν μέγιστον ποιοῦνται τῶν καθαρμῶν, νῦν μὲν εἴδωλα ῥιπτοῦντες ἀπὸ τῆς γεφύρας εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν, πάλαι δ' ἀνθρώπους;

Another detail can confirm this. In his famous list of taboos imposed upon the *flamen Dialis* and his *flaminica*, Gellius says that the *flaminica* was forbidden to comb her hair and to groom her head "when she went to the *Argei*"[58]. This is often connected with the bridge ritual – but in Dionysius, she does not figure among the participants. On the other hand, she cannot belong to the March ritual either, since Plutarch gives the same taboos as another indication for the dark nature of the May rite[59]. We understand this better when taking up an ingenious conjecture of Radke: he took Ovid's formula in order to correct Gellius' text: the *flaminica* does not comb her hair, *cum it<ur> ad argeos*, "when one goes to the *Argei*"[60] – but not, as in Ovid, to the shrines in March, but to the bridge in May.

If the rite is "the most important purificatory rite" of Rome, it must purify the entire city. This explains the participation of the pontifices and the Vestal Virgins and the role of the shrines which were disposed over the entire extent of the archaic city, inside the Servian wall[61]: the mannequins, each representing their part of the town, were disposed of together. This does not make the rite into a scapegoat ritual, but comes close. In a scapegoat ritual, a living being is first fed by the city, then paraded through the entire city and finally chased out of bounds, carrying with himself all the defilment of the city[62]. The mannequins were not led round the city, they were kept in one shrine; there, they must have been the object of some rite in March, perhaps a sacrifice or a prayer and libation, fitting for the graves of noblemen of old, before they were turned over to the Virgins for disposal. The *pharmakoi* were liminal persons, usually slaves or criminals; the mannequins were made of rush, which associates then with the liminal regions of riverboards and swamps.

But why mannequins and not living beings, as in the *pharmakos* rites? Already the ancient expounders read this as an attenuation and transformation of a grimmer rite, and modern scholars concurred. This explanation from diachrony, though, is based on the specific assumption that societies and religions developed from the more cruel to the less cruel, from the less human to the more human. Recent research on human sacrifice in Greece has shown that this model is not valid: in Greece and Rome, there never have been human sacrifices where our sources recorded them as being very old[63]. In our case, the theme of former human sacrifice gives expression to the atmosphere of uncan-

58 Gell. 10,15,30 *cum it ad Argeos, quod neque comit caput neque capillum depectit.*

59 Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 86, 284 F διὸ καὶ τὴν Φλαμινίκαν, ἱερὰν τῆς Ἥρας εἶναι δοκοῦσαν, νενόμισται σκυθρωπάζειν, μήτε λουομένην τηνικαῦτα μήτε κοσμουμένην.

60 G. Radke, *Latomus* 49 (1990) 11.

61 See the plan in D. Sabbatucci, *op. cit.* (above n. 1) 102. – One sanctuary has perhaps been found: excavations on the Via del Monte Oppio isolated a cult place with finds from the 6th cent. BC (a bronze kouros) up to the Imperial epoch, *Boll. Arch.* 1990, 181–183.

62 See J. N. Bremmer, *op. cit.* (above n. 55).

63 See above n. 31.

niness which also provoked the taboos of the *flaminica Dialis*. The mannequins thus belong to the rite and its symbolical structure: what for?

Here, the second mythical theme might help: the mannequins represent and make visible absent dead bodies. In March, these representations were visited and presumably ritually tended, with sacrifices and prayers; in May, they were ceremoniously but finally sent away. A Greek rite gives an important parallel to this process. A long inscription from Cyrene, written in the late 4th century but recording a much older text, formulates regulations about religious purity and impurity (καθαρμοὶ καὶ ἁγνῆαι); one chapter deals with ἱκέσιοι which must mean 'visitants', though this has been debated[64]. The ritual which interests us here is as follows[65]:

28 Ἱκεσίων
ἱκέσιος ἔπακτος. αἴ κα ἐπιπεμφθῆι ἐπὶ τὰν
οἰκίαν, αἰ μέγ κα ἴσαι ἀφ' ὅτινός οἱ ἐπῆνθε, ὀ-
νυμαξεῖ αὐτὸν προειπὼν τρὶς ἁμέρας· αἰ δέ
32 κα τεθνάκηι ἔγγαιος ἢ ἄλλη πη ἀπολώληι,
αἰ μέγ κα ἴσαι τὸ ὄνυμα, ὀνυμαστὶ προερεῖ, αἰ
δέ κα μὴ ἴσαι "ὦ ἄνθρωπε αἴτε ἀνὴρ αἴτε γυνὰ
ἐσσί". κολοσὸς ποιήσαντα ἔρσενα καὶ θηλείαν
36 ἢ καλίνος ἢ γαίνος, ὑποδεξάμενον παρτιθέ-
μεν τὸ μέρος πάντων· ἐπεὶ δέ κα ποιῆσες τὰ
νομιζόμενα, φέροντα ἐς ὕλαν ἀεργὸν ἐρεῖ-
σαι τὰς κολοσὸς καὶ τὰ μέρη.

It is a private rite; its aim is to get rid of a ghost sent by someone else into a private house. If the sender is known, his name is publicized; this presumably makes him recall the visitant. Otherwise, the victim has to take more drastic measures: first, the ghost is made visible through an image (or through two images between which the ghost choses); the image – i.e. the ghost – is treated as a guest in order to break his hostility: having eaten at the same table, he is bound by the laws of hospitality. Then, the images are transferred to the very margins

64 F. Sokolowski, *Lois Sacrées des Cités Grecques. Supplément* (Paris 1962) no. 115 B 28–39; R. Parker, *op. cit.* (above n. 55) 332–351; M. H. Jameson/D. R. Jordan/R. D. Kotansky, *A Lex Sacra from Selinous* (Durham, NC 1993) 55; Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead. Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley 1999) 58f.

65 Translation from R. Parker, *op. cit.* (above n. 55) 347: "Visitant sent by spells. If a visitant is sent against the house, if (the householder) knows from whom he came to him, he shall name him by proclamation for three days. If (the sender of the visitant) has died in the land or perished anywhere else, if (the householder) knows his name he shall make proclamation by name, but if he does not know his name (in the form) 'O man, whether you are a man or a woman'. Having made male and female figurines either of wood or of earth, he shall entertain them and offer them a portion of everything. When you have done what is customary, take the figurines and the portions to an unworked wood and deposit them there."

of human space, the "unworked woods" and left there; being made of wood or clay, they will slowly rot away.

The unworked wood is the place to which καθάρματα, the remains of purificatory rites, are brought; they correspond to the river or the sea. The other differences have to do with the public character of the Roman ritual: it involves the entire city. Therefore, there are 27 mannequins, not only two κολοσσοί, distributed over the entire town; they are not entertained at a private table but visited and tended in the course of a complex rite in March, and they are sent away by representatives of the entire city – Rome's pontiffs, the Vestal Virgins as the providers of purity, and selected representatives of the citizen body. The aim, though, must be similar: to get rid of unwanted and dangerous spirits who might haunt the town.

In this function, the ritual of the Argei corresponds to the Lemuria of May 9[66]. The Lemuria are a ritual performed in the private houses; they contain cult at the family grave and a rite by the *pater familias*; he sends away the *manes paterni*, the ancestral spirits[67]. Thus, they have the same double structure of reverence with the aim of propitiating uncanny powers and sending them away for good that we find at Cyrene and with the Argei. The private ritual, though, did not seem enough; six days later, the city repeated the sending away on a larger scale.

66 The connection has been made by others as well, most recently by B. Nagy, *op. cit.* (above n. 1) 10–13.

67 Ov. *Fasti* 5,443 *manes exite paterni!*