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Citation style: Doroszewska Julia. (2015). When the Dead love the Living : a Case Study in Phlegon of Tralles s Mirabilia. "Scripta Classica" (Vol. 12 (2015), s. 137-149).



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When the Dead Love the Living: A Case Study in Phlegon of Tralles's *Mirabilia*

.... [the nurse] went to the door of the guest room, and in the light of the burning lamp she saw the girl sitting beside Machates. Because of the extraordinary nature of the sight, she did not wait there any longer but ran to the girl's mother screaming, 'Charito! Demonstratos!' She said they should get up and come with her to their daughter, who was alive and by some divine will was with the guest in the guest room.¹

Abstract: An interesting narrative about a revenant found in the first chapter of the *Mirabilia*, a collection of marvelous stories by Phlegon of Tralles (2nd century AD), has been examined and interpreted by many. Scholars usually discussed the narrative's origin, composition, and style, and also the vague identity of the main character of the story, a girl by the name of Philinnion, and her affiliation with ghost-lore. No one of them, however, attempted to locate Philinnion within the category of the restless dead which she seems to belong to, namely, ἄωροι – the prematurely dead. This distinct type of the dead, as is inferred from numerous ancient literary and non-literary sources, was believed to be especially prone to interaction with the living. In this article I attempt to examine the figure of Philinnion in the context of beliefs in the prematurely dead by means of which I hope to better explain crucial problems encountered by modern readers by answering questions regarding Philinnion's identity and her rationale for returning to the world of the living.

Key words: Phlegon of Tralles, revenants, ghosts, restless dead

¹ Phlegon, *Mir.*1.: <***> εἰς τὸν ξενῶνα προσπορεύεται ταῖς θύραις, καὶ καιομένου τοῦ λύχνου καθημένην <ε>ἶδεν τὴν ἄνθρωπον παρὰ τῷ Μαχάτῃ. οὐκ ἔτι δὲ καρτερήσασα πλείονα χρόνον διὰ τὸ θαυμαστὸν τῆς φαντασίας τρέχει πρὸς τὴν μητέρα, καὶ βοήσασα μεγάλη τῇ φωνῇ “Χαριτοὶ” καὶ “Δημόστρατε” ᾤετο δεῖν ἀναστάντας ἐπὶ τὴν θυγατέρα αὐτοῦς μετ’ αὐτῆς πορεύεσθαι· πεφηνέαι γὰρ ζῶσαν εἶναι τε μετὰ τοῦ ξένου διὰ τινα θεῖαν βούλησιν ἐν τῷ ξενῶνι. Trans. by W. Hansen: *Phlegon of Tralles' Book of Marvels*, Exeter 1996, p. 25. All quotations from the *Mirabilia*, unless stated otherwise, are taken from this edition.

The quotation used as the motto of this article is how one of the most beautiful and mysterious narratives of ancient literature begins. The text comes from a compilation of marvelous stories, the so-called *Mirabilia (On Marvels)* by Phlegon of Tralles, a Greek freedman of the emperor Hadrian (reigned 117–138 AD).

In fact, as one easily realizes, the said quotation is not the original beginning of the story. The *Mirabilia* have survived to our times in a single manuscript, the Palatinus Graecus 398, which is corrupted. Therefore, the first part of the narrative has been lost: today it begins, literally, *in medias res* – it opens in mid-sentence, of which we learn that a nurse approaching the door of a guestroom finds that the guest is not alone but is accompanied by a woman. To her horror she immediately recognizes the woman as Philinnion – her master and mistress’s daughter who died some time before.

Speaking in Riddles: The Plot of the Story

Due to the text’s incompleteness, the identity of the protagonists remains unknown to the modern reader. Fortunately, the lost fragment can be supplied from Proklos (*In Rem Publicam Commentarii* 2.116 Kroll), who provides, although a much shorter, version of the same story. Proklos, in turn, quotes as his source a certain Naumachios of Epeiros, a personality not known from elsewhere, who is located by scholars in the 4th century AD, since Proklos, living in the 5th century himself, dates him as being of his grandfathers’ generation. Phlegon, Naumachios, and Proklos most likely used the same source for their accounts.

After patching the two versions together² – the one by Phlegon and that by Proklos – we obtain the following tale: In the Greek city of Amphipolis a couple, that is Demonstratos and Charito, marry their daughter Philinnion to a man named Krateros. The girl dies shortly after the wedding and is buried in the family tomb. Six months later a young man, Machates, comes from Pella and visits the girl’s parents’ house. He resides in the guest room. Machates receives a nocturnal visit from a girl by the name of Philinnion. Apparently, he is not aware of the fact that she is the hosts’ recently deceased daughter. The young man and woman spend the night together and exchange love-tokens – she gives him a gold ring and he gives her an iron one and a gilded wine cup. The girl leaves unnoticed before day-break. During the second night the nurse discovers her presence in the guest room and reports this fact to the girl’s mother, Charito. On the third night, Charito and Demonstratos (the girl’s father), having been informed discreetly about her arrival

² Erwin Rohde in his study “Zu den *Mirabilia* des Phlegon.” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 1877, Vol. 32, pp. 329–339, was the first who collated the text by Phlegon with that by Proklos.

by Machates, interrupt their meeting and find their daughter who died half a year earlier. Philinnion accuses her parents of meddling in her affairs that should remain undisclosed to them since her return came by divine will. After saying that, she drops dead again. The despaired parents and the entire house begin their mourning anew. The rumour of what happened quickly spreads throughout the city and comes to the ears of the governor. He keeps the crowds, attracted by the news, who come to Philinnion's parents' house, in check. The next day a great crowd gathers at the theater where the matter is then discussed. It is decided to open up Philinnion's tomb to see whether her body lies on its bier. On entering the chamber the governor and his men find the bones or the bodies of all of Philinnion's dead ancestors in place, but her own bier is empty, beside it lie the iron ring and golden cup that Machates had given her on the first night. Astonished and terrified, they proceed to Philinnion's house again, where they find her body stretched out on the floor. An assembly is called during which such a serious matter is discussed again. A certain Hyllos, regarded as a wise man and excellent augur, bids to bury the girl's body outside the city's boundaries and to propitiate the Chthonic Hermes and the Eumenides. He also tells the governor in private that he should inform his king about the prophetic implications of the episode and that a sacrifice should be made to Hermes, Zeus Xenios and Ares. His instructions are carefully carried out. But Machates kills himself in despondency.

Really Dead? Philinnion's Identity

Here this beautiful, novella-like narrative ends. Its appeal lies mainly in the atmosphere of mystery and in a plot full of riddles; for the plot poses many questions which, in the majority, avoid clear and simple answers. The most intriguing riddle is certainly the vague identity of the girl by the name of Philinnion – the main character of the story. Thus the general questions concerning this issue are: Who actually is Philinnion: is she a ghost or not? What was her purpose to come to Charito and Demonstratos's house? Why does she visit Machates? In this article, I will attempt to answer these questions by examining the narrative's main episodes, by means of which I hope to explain the key problems encountered by the modern reader and to obtain and interpret the overall meaning of the story. Many scholars have been interested in this narrative and have especially discussed its origin, composition, and style, but also the figure of Philinnion as the revenant and her affiliation with ghost-lore³; no one, however, attempted to locate Philinnion

³ To name but a few: E. Rohde: "Zu den *Mirabilia*..." pp. 329–339; P. Wendland: "Antike Geister- und Gespenstergeschichten." In: *Festschrift zur Jahrhundertfeier der Universität zu Breslau*

within the category of the restless dead which she seems to belong to, namely, the ἄωποι – the prematurely dead. This special type of the dead, as is inferred from numerous ancient literary and non-literary sources, was believed to be especially prone to interact with the living. By means of examining the figure of Philinnion in the context of the prematurely dead I hope to solve the riddles found in the plot and to better explain the main character's identity and her rationale for returning to the world of the living.

Philinnion's identity and motives for her return are the crucial problems encountered by the reader of the narrative. For from the very beginning until the end Philinnion escapes neither easy categorization into the living nor the dead. During the whole course of action she is never explicitly named a ghost nor dead, and a description of her is not provided by the narrator. We have but a few words by which she is referred to in the narrative: several times the term ἡ ἄνθρωπος (a female human, a woman) appears; also a couple of times her name – Philinnion – is used; once, in the scene when she “dies again” she is described as dead (νεκρά). And finally, at the very end of the story, she is explicitly called φάσμα (a ghost, an apparition) – obviously for the sake of surprise and sensation. As Debbie Felton⁴ aptly observes, such a description of Philinnion as being a ghost or a phantom (φάσμα) indicates that Greek terminology did not distinguish between insubstantial and embodied apparitions, for evidently she is a corporeal ghost, namely – a revenant. Of that we have many proofs, yet not explicit, as everything can be deduced only from her appearance and behaviour. And she looks and acts like a real girl to the extent that she is able to delude the young man, Machates, who does not least suspect that he is dealing with someone or something other than a living woman. First of all, Philinnion wears casual clothes; and clothes are used as proof of her being alive – Machates shows to the girl's mother her breast-band that she left as well as the golden ring that he received from her the night before.

im Namen der Schlesischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde. Ed. T. Siebs. Breslau 1911, pp. 9–32; L. Collison Morley: *Greek and Roman Ghost Stories*. Oxford 1912. J.C. Lawson: “ΠΕΡΙ ΑΛΙΒΑΝΤΩΝ. Part 1.” In: *The Classical Review* 1926, Vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 52–58; and more recently by: W. Hansen: *Phlegon of Tralles...*; Idem: “An ancient Greek ghost story.” In: *Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Dégh*. Eds. N. Burlakoff, C. Lindahl. Bloomington, IN 1980, pp. 71–77; Idem: “Contextualizing the story of Philinnion.” In: *Midwestern Folklore* 1989, Vol. 15, pp. 101–108; J. Radner: “The Woman Who Went to Hell. Coded Values in Irish Folk Narrative.” In: *Midwestern Folklore* 1989, Vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 109–117; D. Felton: *Haunted Greece and Rome*. Austin 1999; A. Stramaglia: “Sul Peri thaumasion di Flegonte di Tralle.” In: *Studi Classici e Orientali* 1995, Vol. 45, pp. 191–234; Idem: “Tre « femmes fatales » soprannaturali.” In: *Vicende e figure femminili*. Ed. R. Raffaelli. Ancona 1995, pp. 217–226; Idem: “Res inaudite, incredulae”: storie di fantasmi nel mondo greco-latino. Bari 1999; Idem: *Eros: antiche trame greche d'amore*. Bari 2000; D. Ogden: *Witches, Wizards and the Dead in the Ancient World*. London 2008; J.R. Morgan: “Love from beyond the Grave: The Epistolary Ghost-Story in Phlegon of Tralles.” In: *Epistolary Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*. Eds. O. Hodkinson, P. Rosenmeyer, E. Bracke. Brill. Leiden Boston 2013, pp. 293–321.

⁴ D. Felton: *Haunted Greece...*, p. 25.

The clothes appear once again in quite a strange context, when Machates suspects the girl he has met to be dressed in dead Philinnion's clothes. Such a morbid idea appears in his mind when he tries to explain to himself Philinnion's parents' claim that his mysterious mistress is their dead daughter. His explanation relies on the idea that some robbers opened Philinnion's tomb, took off her clothes and then sold them to the other girl's father.

Yet Philinnion acts like a real girl: she uses her own body in the same way the living do. She eats and drinks with Machates (δειπνούσης μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ συμπινούσης) and, most importantly, she is able to have sexual intercourse with him. The latter is stated explicitly, since we learn that Machates "did not believe that he consorted/had sex with a dead girl" (οὐ πιστεύων εἰ νεκρᾷ πλησιάζοι); although the verb πλησιάζειν is ambiguous, meaning "to consort with" but also "to have sexual intercourse with," thus we guess that the youngsters had begun an intimate relationship and we can infer from Philinnion's confession that she came to Machates driven by desire/lust (ἐπιθυμία). Her ability to have such close and intimate contact with Machates means that her body – her scent and temperature – did not differ from the real body of a living person. Therefore, she was a reanimated corpse but, so to say, a fresh and good-looking corpse: a seductive revenant. Her ghostly identity is explicitly revealed and confirmed in the final part of the story. The reader learns that "Machates, the guest whom the ghost (φάσμα) visited, became despondent and killed himself." For the first and last time the word "ghost" appears, and, as a matter of fact, it is perversely mentioned somewhat passingly, as if Philinnion's real identity was obvious from the very beginning. The end of the story reveals the mystery of the main character's ambiguous identity, but does not explain at all Philinnion's motives for her return.

"Neither properly dead nor properly alive" Why Do the Dead Return?

The reader is then left alone with the question concerning Philinnion's rationale for returning and visiting Machates. Although one may intuitively work out that her general motivation was love, the problem arises of the dead's capacity to feel emotions and desires. Therefore, Philinnion's particular case needs to be examined in the broader context of popular religion and ideas about the afterlife. However, depicting such a context in ancient Greek and Roman culture appears to be a truly difficult task, since in antiquity there was no single coherent concept regarding the existence after death: we are dealing with a true mix of different – sometimes even conflicting – ideas that were preserved mainly in literary

sources. The said inconsistencies are clearly indicated by an English author, Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682), in his work *Hydriotaphia*, whose words I quote after Felton⁵:

The departed spirits know things past and to come, yet are ignorant of things present. Agamemnon fortels what should happen unto *Ulysses*, yet ignorantly enquires what is become of his own Son. The Ghosts are afraid of swords in *Homer*, yet *Sibylla* tells *Aeneas* in *Virgil*, the thin habit of spirits was beyond the force of weapon. The spirits put off their malice with their bodies, and *Caesar* and *Pompey* accord in Latine Hell, yet *Ajax* in *Homer* endures not a conference with *Ulysses*: And *Deiphobus* appears all mangled in *Virgils* Ghosts, yet we meet with perfect shadows among the wounded ghosts in *Homer*.⁶

At the beginning of the 20th century Lacy Collison-Morley⁷ pointed out the ancients' confusion when they came to picture the afterlife. What we get from the sources is, actually, according to the scholar, a combination of elaborate Greek mythology with the primitive beliefs of Italy, and of Greece also, in spirits of the dead that live in the tomb with the body. Along with cremation gradually superseding a burial, the idea of the possible independent existence of the soul appeared.⁸ Briefly, according to Keith Hopkins's words,⁹ Greek and Roman beliefs "ranged from the completely nihilistic denial of afterlife, through a vague sense of souls' existence, to a concept of the individual soul's survival and of personal survival in a recognizable form."

It seems, however, that some fixed ideas about why some of the dead were restless existed. "In many cultures – says Sarah Iles Johnston¹⁰ – both ancient and modern, three types of dead are almost always presumed to be dangerously restless: those who have not received funeral rites (ἄταφοι), the untimely or prematurely dead (ἄωροι), and those who have died violently (βί(αι)οθάνατοι)." From explicit or implicit mentions in many ancient sources, as various as Homer, Virgil, Plato, Apuleius, Pausanias, Tertullian, or Suidas, we infer that these categories of restless dead also functioned in ancient Greece and Rome; it would be difficult, however, to say to what point such a classification was developed. A brief survey of some of these beliefs may shed some light on the meaning of Philinnion's story.

⁵ D. Felton: *Haunted Greece...*, p. XIII.

⁶ T. Browne: *Hydriotaphia*. New York 1977 [1658], p. 62; the original spelling has been retained.

⁷ L. Collison-Morley: *Greek and Roman...*, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

⁹ K. Hopkins: *Death and Renewal. Sociological Studies in Roman History*. Vol. 2. Cambridge 1983, p. 227.

¹⁰ S. Iles Johnston: *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and Dead in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley 1999, p. 127.

Herbert J. Rose aptly points out that: “Indeed, the whole horror of vampires, ἄωροι, βιαιοθάνατοι, and such uncanny spooks, is that they are not properly dead at all. The living one is used to; the real dead are all very well in their way; [...] but the others are, in Bram Stoker’s expressive phrase, ‘Undead’.”¹¹ Actually, Philinnion also seems to not be properly dead: she is a revenant, the undead, and very likely the category she falls within is the category of the untimely dead, the ἄωροι. Philinnion’s case is not a need for funeral rites, since her burial in the family tomb is mentioned explicitly in the narrative; nor is anything known about her violent death. Therefore, leaving the ἄταφοι and βιαιοθάνατοι aside, in this article I will focus on the prematurely dead, since this group of the restless seems more promising for my attempt to solve the riddle of Philinnion’s motives for return.

Fortunately, we get quite a precise definition of this category of the dead from late antiquity. The Christian author, Tertullian, in his work *De Anima* (56–57), characterizes it this way: “And they say that souls that experience death before their time wander about until they complete the remainder of the period for which they would have lived if they had not died early. [...] Either it is excellent to be kept here with the ‘untimely dead’ or it is awful to be kept here with the ‘dead-by-violence’, to employ the terms now voiced by the source of such beliefs, namely magic – Ostanes, Typhon, Dardanus, Damigeron, Nectabis, and Berenice. A famous text promises to evocate even souls that have been laid to rest at their proper age, even souls separated from their bodies by a just death, and even souls dispatched with prompt burial.”¹²

Tertullian refers in this passage to the magical practices performed by pagan sorcerers, and demonstrates the importance of the standard categorization of the restless dead, developed allegedly by Ostanes and others, which served for ghost-manipulation in magic; however, the “famous text” about evocations that Tertullian alludes to remains unidentifiable.¹³

For the ἄωροι we also have nonliterary evidence, namely the κατάδεσμοι – the lead tablets with written curses that were deposited in or near the graves and were requests sent by the living to the deceased in order to receive their help in important matters, or, to formulate it more safely, to use them as messengers carrying

¹¹ H.J. Rose: “Antigone and the Bride of Corinth.” *The Classical Quarterly* 1925, Vol. 19 (3–4), p. 149.

¹² Trans. by D. Ogden. In: Idem: *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds. A Sourcebook*. Oxford 2009 (1st edn. 2002), p. 151. Tertullian, *De Anima* 56–57: aiunt et immatura morte praeventas eo usque vagari istic, donec reliquatio compleatur aetatum, qua cum pervixissent, si non intempestive obissent. [...] aut optimum est hic retineri secundum **ahoros** [=aōroi] aut pessimum secundum **biaeothanatos** [=biaiothanatoi], ut ipsis iam vocabulis utar quibus auctrix opinionum istarum magia sonat, Ostanes et Typhon et Dardanus et Damigeron et Nectabis et Berenice. Publica iam litteratura est quae animas etiam iusta aetate sopitas, etiam proba morte disiunctas, etiam prompta humatione dispunctas evocaturam se ab inferum incolatu pollicetur.

¹³ Cf. D. Ogden: *Magic...*, p. 151.

the words of the tablets to the underworld deities.¹⁴ The bulk of such tablets was discovered in the graves of the untimely dead, as far as we can determine the age of the deceased from skeletal remains or grave goods.¹⁵

The remedies for the ἄωροι were not as simple as in the case of ἄταφοι, who just needed proper burial rites. The motivation for the return of this type of the dead seems to be more complex as well. In general, they were considered as potentially angry ghosts who had not completed their lives, which in fact remained unfinished, so they lingered between categories, unable to pass into proper death. Tertullian refers to them as wandering souls trying to complete the missing period of their lifetime.

Inferring from many ancient sources, in the process of such completion of their lifetime the souls of the prematurely dead were believed to be particularly dangerous: this group of the restless included mostly female ghosts who were driven by envy and desire to deprive the living of what they themselves had been deprived of – they attacked and killed women of reproductive age and their babies.¹⁶ For women, the primary function in the family and in society was to bear and successfully nurture children: their goal in life was to be a mother, therefore women who died prematurely were automatically perceived as such who had failed to meet the fundamental duty they were to perform for society and, consequently, they broke the social order, or at least did not form the most important part of its structure, namely the family.¹⁷ The ghosts of such unsuccessful women who had died “in transition” were presumed to return and cause problems to the living, especially attacking women and their babies. Many types of malicious demons fall within the category of the ἄωροι. Some of them were mythic characters such as Gello, Lamia, or Mormo, to whom specific stories have been ascribed.¹⁸ Their names, used in the plural – such as the *lamiai* (λάμναι) or *mormones* (μορμόνες) – referred to other aggressive female ghosts. The stories about Mormo, Gello, or Lamia present them as originally mortal women who had failed to bear or successfully nurture children, although not all of them are described explicitly as being prematurely dead in our sources.¹⁹ They must have been, however, commonly equated, as we can conclude from the passage of the scholiast to Theokritos, who defines Mormo

¹⁴ Cf. S. Iles Johnston: *Restless Dead...*, p. 72.

¹⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 71.

¹⁶ See an excellent study on this topic by S. Iles Johnston: “Childless Mothers and Blighted Virgins: Female Ghosts and Their Victim” in her *Restless Dead...*, pp. 161–203.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 169–175.

¹⁸ *Zen. Prov.* 3.3 = *Sapph. fr.* 178.; *Hsch.*, s.v. *gello*; *Psell. ap. Leo Allatius De Graecorum hodie quorundam opinionibus epistola* (Cologne 1643), § 3; *Cyranides*, a collection of magical lore includes special spells to avert Gello: *Cyr.* 2.31.20–23 and 2.40.35–38. On this topic see also the passages below, pp. 145–146. Cf. S. Iles Johnston: *Restless Dead...*, pp. 164–167.

¹⁹ Zenobius explicitly calls Gello “a virgin [...] prematurely dead” (*παρθένος... ἄωρος ἐτελεύτησε*, *Cent.* 1. 3.3.).

as another name for Lamia and Gello,²⁰ and from the scholiast to Aristides, who notes the similarity between Mormo's and Lamia's story and seems to describe Mormo as a kind of λάμιαι.²¹ Apollonios of Tyana (*VA*. 4.25) describes the demon who seduced the young Menippos as one of the ἔμπουσαι, considered by others as λάμιαι or μορμολυκία.²²

As former humans they seem to retain their body to some extent since they are capable of attacking women and strangling their babies. The most famous Lamia, exposed by Apollonios of Tyana, was able to have sexual intercourse with a man (*VA*.4.25), which makes her resemble Philinnion in this respect. The form of a beautiful woman was not the only one that such demons had, since their common significant feature was their talent in shape-shifting. The best known description of Empousa's metamorphoses is to be found in Aristophanes's *Frogs* (288–295), when Ksantias and Dionysos encounter her in Hades: first she takes the shape of a bull, then a mule, then a lovely woman, then a dog and, finally, she shows her real face that burns like fire, with one of her legs being of bronze and the other of cow dung. This description is significant since it perfectly shows the hybrid character of a demon such as Empousa, which confirms its status of a liminal being situated between two (or more) categories. Shape-shifting, as Iles Johnston says, is “a diachronic rather than synchronic form of hybridism: the demon does not necessarily display traits of two or more categories simultaneously, as the werewolf does, but its ability to change from human to horse to fire to tiger nonetheless prevents its secure categorization and thus is frightening.”²³

In the 7th century AD, John Damascene, in his brief treatise against female demons,²⁴ says that some people claim to have seen or heard of how στρύγγαι (*stryngai*) enter houses despite locked doors with body or with spirit alone²⁵; from

²⁰ *Schol.* Theoc.15.40c: Μορμώ: Λάμια βασίλισσα Λαιστρυγόνων ἢ καὶ Γελλῶ λεγομένη [...].

²¹ *Schol.* Aristid. p. 41 Dindorf: ἃ δὲ τοὺς παῖδας φοβεῖ καὶ ἐκπλήττει οἶον Λαμίας καὶ τὰ τοιοῦτα φάσματα. λέγει δὲ τὴν Μορμῶ, ἣν ἀκούοντα ὀρρωδεῖ τὰ παιδία...

²² Philostr. *VA*.4.25: ἡ χρηστὴ νύμφη μία τῶν ἐμπουσῶν ἐστίν, ἃς λαμίας τε καὶ μορμολυκίας οἱ πολλοὶ ἠγούνται.

²³ S. Iles Johnston: *Restless Dead...*, p. 171.

²⁴ Titled *Περὶ στρυγγῶν* (= *Peri stryngon*, Migne PG 94 1604); the name στρύγγες used by John Damascene comes from the Latin *strix* that denotes a screech-owl which, according to the belief of the ancients, sucked the blood of young children, cf. Plaut. *Ps*.3.2.31; Ov. *F*.6.133 sq.; Plin. *NH*.11.39.95; Tib.1.5.52; Ov. *M*.7.269; Prop. 4(5).5.17; 3(4, 5).6.29; Petr.134.1; the Latin term was likely adapted to Greek in late antiquity. John Damascene also gives Γελοῦδες (*Geloudes*) as another name for these demons: γυναϊκές εἰσι Στρύγγαι, αἱ καὶ (sic) Γελοῦδες λεγόμεναι. According to J.C. Lawson: *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion. A Study in Survivals*. Oxford 1910, p. 179, in modern Greek folklore στρίγγες (*strigles*) are essentially different beings than λαμίας and γελοῦδες; the latter are demons while the former are simply women with the capacity to transform themselves into birds of prey or other animals; there is only the taste for blood that the στρίγγες share with demons.

²⁵ John Damascene (Migne PG 94 1604): καὶ ταῦτα μὲν διαβεβαιοῦνται, οἱ μὲν εἶδειν, οἱ δὲ ἀκοῦσαι, πῶς εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὰ οἰκίας κεκλεισμένων τῶν θυρῶν μετὰ σώματος, ἢ γυμνῆ τῆ ψυχῆ.

which we can conclude that they were believed to be corporeal beings with the capacity to separate their souls from their flesh. Iles Johnston seems to overinterpret this mention,²⁶ translating the quoted passage of Damascene as “the Γελοῦδες and Στρώγγαι were believed to retain some, but not all, of their corporality,” from which she concludes that “they were neither fully flesh so as to enjoy life, not fully free of flesh constraints as were normal residents of the Underworld.”²⁷ Nevertheless, we can see that all of these creatures, such as λαμίαι, ἔμπουσαι, μορμόνες and others, were believed to be corporeal beings.

Philinnion a Demon?

It is doubtful whether Philinnion may be considered a dangerous demon, nevertheless she has something in common with such creatures, for instance corporality, in that she uses her own body which she had before she died. There is also another common point, that is premature death. Although we do not know the circumstances in which Philinnion died, her death was certainly untimely: she passed away as a young bride. However, she does not seem to be a typical – or the most popular – ἄωρος, but a quiet, peaceful ghost. As we shall see next, her motivation is not anger and envy towards the living, who successfully experience what she herself has been deprived of, but most likely desire. Although as a “regular” prematurely dead she returns to complete what was incomplete in her life, in this case it is likely the sexual initiation that she lacks since, as we can suppose, she died before the marriage had been consummated.

“It seems to me necessary to assume that she died still a virgin, and fairly likely that in the original story Machates and Krateros were one and the same person. However, this last point is not quite necessary; Machates, if not her actual husband, was well fitted to represent him, being an outsider who declared himself such by sleeping in the guest-room. What makes me think that he was her husband is that, according to Phlegon, he gave her an iron ring, which is surely a gift rather suited to a bride than light-o’-love” – points out Rose²⁸ and refers here to the passage in Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* (33.12), which relates that an iron ring is sent to a bride.²⁹

²⁶ Or another passage from the treatise, since Iles Johnston does not quote the exact part of the text she discusses (Iles Johnston also gives the incorrect bibliographical address: Migne PA 94 1064 instead of PA 94 1604).

²⁷ S. Iles Johnston: *Restless Dead...*, p. 176.

²⁸ H.J. Rose: *Antigone...*, p. 149.

²⁹ *NH.32.12*: sponsae [...] ferreus anulus mittitur.

It is unclear if Krateros and Machates were in fact one and the same person, but if not, then Philinnion's nocturnal visits to a stranger instead of her own husband appear even more intriguing. We read that she confessed to Machates that her desire (ἐπιθυμία) was so strong that she came to him secretly, without her parents knowing. Proklos says that she comes to him driven by love/desire (διὰ τὸν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔρωτα; in *R. Comm.* 2.116 Kroll). Erwin Rohde³⁰ suggested that Philinnion and Machates had loved each other before, but that the girl had been forced to marry another man – Krateros; she thus died of despair. Rohde's supposition is, however, illogical, since in Phlegon, Machates did not recognize Philinnion as his former beloved; apparently he did not know the girl at all. It seems obvious that if the young man knew Philinnion the story would lose its mystery, thus the author made his characters alien to each other for the sake of surprise and sensation.

Another possibility is that Philinnion visits a stranger because her husband, Krateros, has also died. That would easily explain her return as being motivated by her need or desire for something that her husband was no longer able to give her: obviously for the sexual intercourse.

Therefore, if Philinnion died a virgin, by no means can she be considered as the prematurely dead, which would definitely mean she is not the properly dead. Her situation is quite pitiable: she is a liminal being stuck between two opposing worlds: the upper and the underworld, as well as between the single and the married state. Her return may be seen as an effort or rather a task to complete a kind of rite of passage by means of sexual initiation: the experience she had been deprived of by her premature death.

Philinnion's mysterious words directed towards her parents would rather indicate that her return was a task delegated by a divinity. Caught *in flagranti* with Machates, she complains: "Mother and father, how unfairly you have grudged my being with the guest for three days in my father's house, since I have caused no one any pain. For this reason, on account of your meddling, you shall grieve all over again, and I shall return to the place appointed to me. For it was not without divine will that I came here" (οὐ γὰρ ἄνευ θείας βουλήσεως ἦλθον εἰς ταῦτα). In my view, her complaint suggests that her parents' interruption stopped her on her way to complete the task delegated by a divinity: to achieve rest and become "properly dead" by means of completing of what had not been completed in her short life. Equally mysterious is her statement "I shall return to the place appointed for me" (εἰς τὸν διατεταγμένον τόπον). "The place" may indicate her tomb, meaning "a place appointed for Philinnion by her parents after her death," where she evidently returns after her meeting with Machates and where she leaves the ring and the cup. "The place" may also refer to a place destined by a deity especially for the ἄωροι, who were forbidden to enter Hades proper. The actual meaning of this expression must remain Philinnion's secret as it is too vague and ambiguous to refer to anything specific.

³⁰ E. Rohde: *Zu den Mirabilia...*, p. 333.

Philinnion's other words may be interpreted as a further hint of her motives for her return. She vaguely claims her intentions are peaceful, saying she came to her parents' house with no wish to cause any trouble (λποῦσαν οὐδέν) – *absque ullo maleficio* – as Carl Müller translates this passage in his edition of Phlegon's *Mirabilia*.³¹ However, many modern editors of the *Mirabilia* (e.g. Giannini³²), following Johann August Nauck's conjecture,³³ read in this passage λποῦσαν οὐδένα – “causing no one any pain/any trouble”; this conjecture seems to be justifiable since the verb λπεῖν indicates “to grieve” or “to vex,” thus the personal object οὐδένα, instead of the impersonal οὐδέν in the context of recent death, sounds plausible.³⁴ Since in the works of historians the verb λπεῖν often indicates “to harass,” “to annoy” the enemy by constant attacks,³⁵ Philinnion's words can also have a double meaning – she may be emphasizing that despite her premature death she is not a malicious demon like Λάμια, Ἐμπουσα or other female evil that comes to disturb people.

On the other hand, her motivation for interacting with the living is to some extent similar as in the case of some female demons: she searches for a young man who would satisfy her sexual desire, while λαμίαι and others seek young men to drink their blood, as is explicitly explained by Lamia in *The Life of Apollonios of Tyana* (VA.4.25). And although Philinnion does not have such bloodthirsty intentions, she is dangerous just as the other types of the ἄωροι in the way that she leads, perhaps even unintentionally, her lover to death. We can only wonder what would have happened to Machates if Philinnion had not been recognized by her family. Would he stay alive, unaware that his lover was dead?

This question must remain unanswered, and Philinnion may now return to the place appointed for her. But I must return to the questions posed at the beginning of my article. I hope that in this brief study I managed to answer them at least partially. The questions were: Who actually is Philinnion: a ghost or not? What was her purpose to come to Charito and Demonstratos's house?, and Why does she visit Machates? As for the first question, the answer will be positive: Philinnion is a ghost of a special kind; she is a revenant and belongs to the category of the restless dead due to her premature death. However, she is not the most typical female ghost who attacks women and their babies. Her purpose is to satisfy her desire,

³¹ C. Müller: *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* III. Parisiis 1849, p. 613; Müller founded his edition and translation on the very first edition of the *Mirabilia* by Xylander [W. Holtzmann]: *Antonini Liberalis Transformationum congeries. Phlegontis de mirabilibus & longaevae libellus*. Basileae 1568.

³² A. Giannini: *Paradoxographorum graecorum reliquiae*. Milan 1966, p. 174.

³³ J.A. Nauck in: O. Keller: *Rerum naturalium scriptores Graeci minores* I. Lipsiae 1877, p. 60.

³⁴ All the more that the expression λποῦσαν οὐδένα resembles the formula οὐδένα λπησας or -ασα, found in epitaphs, cf. IG14.1857, 2.1868. *AG App., Epigrammata Sepulcralia*: 359; 602.

³⁵ Cf. H.9.40; Th.6.66; X.HG.6.3.14; An.2.3.23, etc.

which can be symbolically understood as the need to complete the rite of transition in order to pass the threshold between the single and married state; this would be the answer to the second question. In order to achieve her goal she needs a living man who will give her what she is seeking. The young man, Machates, who is being hosted in her parents' house, can give her what she needs and can symbolically be her husband substitute; this may serve as an answer to the third question.

When the dead love the living this means that at least one of the lovers is not who he or she seems to be; in this case the dead does not seem to be properly dead. And Philinnion likely remains as such, disturbed in her way to obtain her rest. Is this to be continued?