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The Classics between Disciplines and Theories: The Anthropology of Ancient Worlds

Abstract: The paper presents the work of the French School of Anthropology of Ancient Worlds, which was developing intensively among the researchers gathered around the Centre Louis Gernet in Paris, named after the pioneer of this approach. This epistemological turn in researching classics is the consequence of the intersection of the classics, history, anthropology, sociology, archaeology, and different critical theories. The shift does not only refer to the change of methodologies, but also to the change of researched themes and phenomena, which are regarded in the concrete socio-political and cultural context. The most important representatives of the first generation in the Centre were Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Marcel Detienne, and Nicole Loraux. Their work has been translated into other languages, while the Centre was a lively place of intellectual dialogue and innovative approaches to antiquity, especially during the 1970s and the 1980s. Extremely interesting dialogue and influences also appeared beyond the borders of France, so the paper will turn briefly to the reception of the school in the Anglophone world, but also in the former Yugoslavia, with the intention to shed light on certain intellectual trajectories in the exchange of ideas.

Key words: Centre Louis Gernet, anthropology of ancient worlds, methodologies, theories, themes, reception

Introduction

In the introduction to *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, Nancy Rabinowitz claims that “the classics have, with few exceptions, been anti-theory in general and anti-feminist in particular” (Rabinowitz 2010, 19). One of the first such exceptions, in regard to a group of researchers (functioning as a school), who approached the ancient past from different transdisciplinary theoretical positions (which also enables a feminist perspective) has been the School of French anthropology of ancient worlds also termed Comparative Anthropology of Ancient Greece (Detienne 2007), Parisian or Gernet School, while its representatives are sometimes called Gernet Classicists (Champagne 2015) or simply ‘équipe’ of the Centre Louis Gernet (Loraux, Nagy & Slatkin 2001, 4; Murray 2020, 140).

Other researchers of the ancient past made a theoretical turn to antiquity as well, opening various perspectives, and raising neglected social topics of marginalized people (slaves, women, foreigners, children) and life domains (e.g. irrationality).¹ One such is the historian Moses Finley (1912–1986), who also influenced the work of the Gernet School, especially Pier-Vidal Naquet (Vidal-Naquet 1965, Vidal-Naquet 2003). Finley and the Gernet classicists mutually made their work known in different countries. Namely, Pierre Vidal-Naquet (together with François Hartog, Claude Mossé, etc.) translated Finley's work into French, making him known also among French readers, while Finley opened the door of British Academia to Parisian scholars. Researchers who also inspired a theoretical turn towards anthropology in the classics are numerous, and I will later briefly turn my attention to the early influence of the School of Cambridge Ritualists. Eric R. Dodds made a great contribution to the research of irrationality. However, my choice to address the Gernet school in this paper is due, on one hand, to their anthropological orientation, and on the other, to the fact that they represent researchers who gathered as a specific *group* with shared methodological positions having various interests and approaches to antiquity. One book would not be enough to represent the work of the School, let alone one article. Therefore this paper is only a fragmentary and humble effort to introduce the work of the School (as well as its influences out of French academia), which resonates well with the contemporary trends in the classics and anthropology.

The school owes its name to Louis Gernet (1882–1962), a pioneer of this approach. He was a classical philologist with a developed interest in sociology and anthropology, a student of Émile Durkheim, a close friend of Henri Lévy-Bruhl, and a member of the Durkheimian sociology circle together with Mauss, Halbwachs, Simiand, Granet, Robert Hertz (Humphreys 1971, 174). This disciplinary orientation did not make Gernet give up researching ancient Greece but did, actually influence the way he approached antiquity, adding a sociological perspective, which was at that time a kind of a turn in researching classics (Humphreys 1971, 175; Loraux, Nagy & Slatkin 2001, 4). Liberating the classics from their exclusively philological focus, he opened new questions and new ways to address them, with a particular focus on the social context and questions crucial for understanding the subtle functioning of societies pointing to radically different meanings of the categories in various cultural, social and political settings, distanced in space and time.

Gernet was not present on the French academic scene until he was already sixty-six years old, when he moved back from Algeria (where he had lived from 1917 until 1947) and started teaching at the 6th Section of the *École Pratique des*

¹ Mary Beard mentions also the influence of the Irish poet and classicist Louis MacNeice (Beard 2013, 6), who engaged more in modernist poetry than in academia.

Hautes Études (EPHE) in 1948. The 6th Section of the EPHE was newly founded (in 1946) by historian Lucien Febvre, making it the institutional basis for the Annales historical school, which was oriented towards historical anthropology, focusing on microhistories and the history of “mentalities” (Murray s.v. *Historiography*). Such a research orientation and interests influenced Louis Gernet and the School of anthropology of Ancient Worlds.²

In the same year when he started teaching, Gernet became the general secretary and editor-in-chief of the *Année Sociologique*, staying in this position until his death (Humphreys 1971, 175). Although a devoted and excellent editor and an exceptional expert in Greek law and society, as an innovator in his approach to ancient Greek society, extremely shy as he was, Gernet was not sufficiently known and recognized outside the narrow circle of his students and scholars of similar interests. Luckily, his disciples recognized the originality and importance of his work, continuing to develop his methodological innovations, and making Gernet acknowledged posthumously. Namely, two years after his death, the Centre de Recherches Comparées sur le Sociétés Anciennes (later renamed Centre Louis Gernet) was founded in Paris at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS)³, in which scholars continued to develop the approach to antiquity that their forerunner initiated. One of those, particularly important for the whole school and for re-publishing Gernet’s work, making it available to a wider academic audience, was Jean-Pierre Vernant. Apart from publishing Gernet’s articles in the book *Anthropologie de la Grèce antique* (1968), Jean-Pierre Vernant, together with Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Nicole Loraux, Marcel Detienne and other scholars continued to develop Gernet’s methodology, innovating the approach to antiquity, opening it up not only to a comparison of Greece and Rome with other cultures but also allowing the use of different theories and the perspectives of various disciplines. It is interesting to note that following Gernet’s ideas, the researchers gathered around the Centre are not recognizable as part of the legacy of French classical scholarship (Leonard 2005, 46). Namely, taking quite an original research path, they opened up toward different disciplines, mainly sociology and anthropology, but also towards various critical theories. In the intellectual climate of the time in Paris, it is not surprising that theory and the classics met precisely during the 1960s and 1970s.

² EPHE was later reorganized, becoming EHESS, where the Gernet Centre also belonged.

³ Since 2010, it is a part of the AHNIMA research centre (Anthropologie et Histoire des Mondes Antiques), which represents a fusion of this institute with the Centre Gustave Glotz (The Researches on Hellenistic and Roman Worlds, formerly CNRS-EPHE-University of Paris 1-University of Paris 4), and Phéacie (Cultural Practices in Greek and Roman Societies, formerly University of Paris 1-University of Paris 7). <https://www.anhima.fr/spip.php?article1346&lang=fr>

However, there is another legacy of classical scholarship that might have influenced the researchers around the Gernet Centre, namely, the circle of the Cambridge Ritualists (Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Francis M. Cornford, Arthur B. Cook), active in the late 19th and early 20th century, especially interested in rituals, theatre but also in the issue of idealization of the ancient past. Their work falls in the period when research in anthropology and the classics did overlap in the context of the evolutionist paradigm that started from the premise that all societies go through different evolutionary phases that are possible to compare. One of the most distinguished representatives of this orientation was the social anthropologist Sir James George Frazer, by his first vocation a classicist close to the Cambridge Ritualists, the author of the colossal work *The Golden Bough*, an encyclopaedia of comparative religion and mythology (Ackerman 2008, 147, Stevanović 2018, 289–291).⁴ However, when the evolutionist paradigm was abandoned in anthropology, due to many generalizations and awareness that the focus should be placed on the different contexts and meanings, cooperation between anthropologists and classicists ended.

Let us now turn to the main methodological positions of the anthropologists of ancient worlds, who started their research some fifty years after the Cambridge Ritualists, consequently introducing research perspectives and approaches different from their predecessors. Being open to the intersection between different disciplines, mainly anthropology, history, sociology, classics, archaeology, and critical theory, the focus of research of anthropologists on antiquity becomes much wider than the one of the classical studies. The standard philological paradigm of classical scholarship oriented primarily towards detailed analysis and the strict focus on the particular problem has been supplemented with research that establishes a clear socio-political context enabling understanding of the studied phenomenon in a concrete cultural setting, while the philological approach becomes just a part of the methodological puzzle (Šterbenc 2000, 8; Stevanović 2018, 293). Awareness of different contexts and complex settings of nuanced meanings (that do not coincide in different cultures) is extremely important for researching antiquity, especially the Greek one, which is often perceived as the cradle of European civilization, being thus “our” glorious past, and as such, a terrain for cultural colonization suitable for numerous inscriptions. Dethroning ancient Greece from a pedestal and pointing to the importance of a critical approach, without neglecting all the uniqueness of this culture, is also one of the merits of this school. From the very beginning, an important orientation of the school was comparativism.

⁴ About the encounters and divergences of anthropology and the classics, and about the influence of Cambridge ritualists on further researches, see more in Stevanović 2018.

Greek antiquity is researched as any other culture, while comparison with other cultures (ancient or contemporary) appears to be desirable, not with the intention of arriving at general conclusions and similarities, but on the contrary, to understand similar phenomena in all nuances of meanings in different contexts. It means that the Greek past, and the idea of Greece as the cradle of European civilization is approached critically, while Greece is dethroned from the pedestal with an intention to be researched in all its complexity. One of the important “colonized” aspects of Greek history is democracy, which has been, from various perspectives, an important topic of research by Pierre Vidal-Naquet (Vidal-Naquet 2003), even when dealing with other issues such as theatre, in the works he co-authored with Jean-Pierre Vernant (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1972).

The crucial and inevitable question for the researchers of the abovementioned orientation has been, in which way it is possible to reconstruct the context. First of all, researchers should become aware of their own position and distance themselves from their prejudices and meanings that belong to their time, as much as it is possible. For the reconstruction of the context, all available resources were used – written texts, archaeological evidence (painted vases, numismatics, monuments, gravestones, grave findings, etc.). And all these were understood textually in a wider sense, meaning that a text is understood as a system of signs.⁵

A huge influence on the approach was made by structuralism, and exactly in the anthropology of ancient worlds structuralism probably produced the most important results, because it was never understood as some general theory (Stevanović 2018, 300). Rather, its usage was always oriented towards a fuller understanding of the phenomenon in question in all of its complexity and specificity of meaning, while the problems were always considered from a wider perspective, especially in regard to the specificity of social organization and democratic institutions. Although Lévi-Strauss was the first to apply structuralism in anthropology, borrowing it from linguistics and thus exerting a huge influence on the representatives of the School, still Louis Gernet in his paper “Sur le symbolisme politique: le Foyer commun” (1951)⁶ applied

⁵ At that time avant-garde, such an approach to texts (digital, visual, media, etc) has lately become quite common in ethnology and anthropology, while field research no longer requires physical movement. See more in Stevanović 2018, 300; Radivojević 421–422.

⁶ The paper was published for the first time in *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* II: 22–43, and later republished in *Anthropologie da la Grèce antique* (1968, 382–403), and later in English translation “Political Symbolism: The Public Hearth” in *Postwar French Thought* III (2001).

the Saussurean model to the research of the social context of Greek society, claiming that:

There is no need here to insist on the importance the examination of symbols has for our understanding of human society, symbols that have to do with unity of the group. To study the *signified* in terms of the *signifier* is to study a social mode of thought that is at times socially richer, since it is not expressed in the usual sort of language; but it is, in its own way, no less organized. On encountering it, we discover that it is the means of making contact with some historical values that other modes of thought no longer preserve. (Gernet 2001, 100–101)

This paragraph is not only illustrative of the structuralist orientation still recognizable in the work of Gernet, but also of the issue and perspective that will preoccupy Gernet's successors and that is research in the history of thought. Apart from the innovative approach toward context, also the themes are not the same as in traditional classical scholarship. Namely, 19th-century academia (that, after all, shaped the ideas about ancient Greece as the European glorious past) focused on the research problems that were considered elite: philosophy, architecture, literature, and rhetoric. Thus, it is possible to notice that the colonial spirit of the time was mirrored also in intellectual interests, so the themes of everyday life, marginalized beings (women, slaves, foreigners, children, animals), and their customs and beliefs were not regarded as important for scholarly research. Being aware of this, anthropologists of ancient worlds turned also to new problems of research: various aspects of the everyday, socio-political, economic, religious, mythological, creative, and cognitive aspects of life that used to be regarded as "low" and therefore unworthy of research. These kinds of interests and topics gradually exceeded the orientation of this particular school, spreading across classical scholarship.

As a result, the methodology of the School, which allows combining numerous different theories and approaches, has been giving various methodological positions. It is precisely this that provides a plethora of intellectual routes to regard issues from diverse perspectives. Not only is such methodology creative and unfixed, but also opinions and standpoints are not in unison, often being challenged among the same group of colleagues and friends. As Gregory Nagy points out, exactly this is "a most effective antidote to assuming that convergences in approach predictably result in consensus of opinion." (Nagy 2019). This absence of consensus (and awareness that consensus is not the goal), is what gives wide-angled prospects enabling the most precious thing that research in humanities might achieve: constant change of perspective and ability to reflect on problems differently, from various perspectives and in more complexity in the process of endless outgrowth.

Encounter of Structuralism and Historical Psychology

The relationship between myths and psychoanalysis, between psychoanalysts and myth, would seem to be an intimate one, and the formula “myth and psychoanalysis” would seem to come quite naturally to the analyst, if it is true that (in André Green’s phrase) he feels “at home” in mythology, especially when that mythology is Greek. But there is always a third party ready to slip in and spoil intimate relationships that are too happy, and, in this instance, such is the role of the historian of the imaginary.

(Loraux 1990, 21)

As I have already stated, the anthropology of ancient worlds also reveals a liberal attitude in regard to the interests of research, including all themes that were formerly excluded, but also retaining interest in the old themes, changing focus and perspective. Exactly this enabled pointing to the widespread misconceptions about antiquity and inscription of meanings by influential European scholars – classical, or from other disciplines. Probably, the most paradigmatic example refuting one (still) very popular misconception is offered by Jean-Pierre Vernant in his text *Oedipus without Complex* published for the first time in 1967⁷. I will shortly focus on this text for several reasons. First, I am going to discuss Vernant’s research into tragedies and his focus not only on the theorization of the functioning of the tragedies (developed by Vernant and Vidal-Naquet) but also on the cognitive development of Greek people that ancient tragedies reveal. Further, I am going to illustrate in which way Vernant used the structural approach⁸, and finally, some light will be shed on Vernant’s work in the field of historical psychology.

Vernant’s *Oedipus without Complex* was later included in a two-volume collection of essays on Greek tragedies that he composed together with Pier Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece (Myth et tragédie en Grèce Ancienne)*, where these two scholars republished some of their previously written texts, some of which they wrote together to compose a book that to a great extent changed the approach to Greek theatre for good.⁹ Vernant’s abovementioned

⁷ “Oedipe sans complexe” *Raison présente* 5(I): 3–20.

⁸ The term ‘structural’ is used instead of ‘structuralist’ to emphasize the difference between the Levi-Strauss semantic model, which is oriented toward research of the universal in myth, and Vernant and other representatives of the French School of Anthropology of Ancient Worlds, who focus on the social and cultural context (Champagne 2015, 72).

⁹ In France the first volume was first published in 1972, while the second appeared in 1986. The translations in English followed in 1981 and in 1992 (as one book that contains both volumes), being later republished several times.

tioned discussion refers to Freud's well-known, and still very popular theory (on the grounds of which many later psychoanalytical theories were derived) that is based on the myth about Oedipus, which Freud used to *prove* the psychological phenomenon that he researched. Namely, Freud claimed that there is a development phase in children's behaviour characterized by intense attachment to one, and hatred towards the other parent. If this phase was not properly resolved, that could lead to psychosis that he termed *Oedipus complex*. Analysing Freud's thesis, Vernant pointed out that Freud's theory does not have any relevance for the research of the ancient past, that Freud completely neglected the ancient context, above all the political and social context of the Athenian theatre, since the myth of Sophocle's tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus* was his main inspiration. On the grounds of such an opinion, it is possible to claim that this interpretation was nothing but a new myth. However, the contextualization in such research, according to Vernant and Naquet, does not mean making constant references to concrete historical circumstances in the narrow sense; after all, tragedy is a theatrical event, and not a documentary piece (Vernant & Naquet 1990, 9). Therefore it is necessary to approach it from a wide perspective and to consider it simultaneously as a social, aesthetic, and psychological phenomenon. The theatre of 5th century Athens appeared in a concrete social context reflecting the cognitive and mental processes, namely the shifts between mythical tradition and the one that was emerging in the new democratic surroundings that made possible the birth of "a man".

This position of Vernant is very interesting since it challenges the widespread notion that the appearance of individualism is related to modernity (Stocking 2020, 4). Thus, it is possible to notice, that Vernant and representatives of the Centre, do not only point to meanings imposed on antiquity but also discover hidden continuities, in this case raising the question of another philosophical position about the relation of individuality and modernity that is taken for granted. However, the position of Vernant is not simple, and complicates this issue. Namely, when Vernant was asked to explain the "birth of a man", at the famous John Hopkins conference in 1966 ("The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man"), he pointed out that "a man" who appears in Classical Greek tragedy still did not mark the birth of subjectivity, since interior self-reflections did not exist yet (Stocking 2020, 13–14, ref. 5). However, the process of the birth of "a man" had started exactly in the theater. Namely, not yet being interiorized, all cognitional reflections happened on the outer level, and therefore the performativity of the theater was important, as a way to enact different issues:

One of the original features of the tragedy, indeed the very mainspring of its action, is this dual relationship with myth. In the tragic conflict the hero, the king, and the tyrant certainly still appear committed to the heroic and mythical tradition, but the solution to the drama escapes them. It is never provided by the hero

on his own; it always expressed the triumph of the collective values imposed by the new democratic city-state. (Vernant and Naquet 1990, 7)

Regarding their structural approach to the tragedies, Vernant and Naquet do not aim at decoding myths in the strict sense of the term, in the totality of all their versions (as Lévi-Strauss suggested), but rather contextually – they focus on myths in tragedies. These reflect the same shift characteristic of the dramatic genre they belong to: the oscillation of mythical thought, and the emerging thought of a new man of the democratic order. Research is thus aimed at discovering the intention and the meaning of the play. Emphasizing that it is not the intention of the author, the intention is sought in the structure of the work itself and in its organization (Vernant and Naquet 1990, 9).

Although the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss¹⁰ had a remarkable influence on the researchers of the Centre, especially with his books *Structural Anthropology* and *The Raw and the Cooked* (Loraux, Nagy and Slatkin 2001, 11),¹¹ it is interesting to note that the least influential for them was his analysis of Oedipus' myth. In the text "The Structural Study of Myth" (1955), a chapter of his *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss used this myth to illustrate his own methodology. However, this formal structural analysis was not contextualised and in the opinion of Vernant, it was much less successful than, for example, the interpretation of the Asdiwal myth (*Le geste d'Asdiwal* 1957) in which Lévi-Strauss paid more attention to the ethnographic and cultural context of the life of Tshimishian Indians (Vernant 1990, 250–251). However, Lévi-Strauss shared the position about the arbitrary relatedness of psychoanalysis and myths, claiming that it was ungrounded to claim that psychoanalysis revived myths in their originality (Lévi-Strauss 1988, 189; Stevanović 2020, 107).

Let me return to Vernant and his attitude toward psychoanalysis. His refutation of Freud's idea that the material of tragedy is a dream of every man in all times, is based on his research of thought development as well as on the influence of Ignace Meyerson and Lucien Fèbvre (one of the historians of the *Annales*), and a position that the psyche is not ahistorical. In his article *History and Psychology* (*L'histoire, science humaine du temps présente: xxve Semaine de Synthèse*, Paris 1965; 85–94) Vernant claims that during two years (1960–1962) the awareness of the necessity of historical psychology came from different disciplines: independently from historians, psychologists and psychiatrists (Vernant 1992, 261), pointing out that "Human experience varies according to civilizations, and within these, according to historical periods" (Vernant

¹⁰ The famous anthropologist was the first to "import" this methodology from linguistics, and to apply the way in which a language was regarded as a system (in which the meaning depended on the relations of the signs of the system) to myth.

¹¹ *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris: Plon 1958; *Le cru et le cuit*, Paris: Plon 1964.

1992, 263). Vernant argues that historical psychology is valuable for psychologists not only for elucidating the historicity of the psyche but also for clearing up the relation between individual and group, between the social and the psychological, which are mutually related (Vernant 1992, 263). However, Vernant does not claim that only specialists in the ancient past are allowed to interpret Greek tragedies. Introducing the term “counter sense”, he points out that different readings and interpretations are legitimate, as long as they are followed by awareness that *Greeks*’ understanding of tragedies was different and specific (Vernant 1992, 274). From this position emanates Vernant’s idea that anyone is free to use myths, as was the case in antiquity, so this position is crucial both for the interpretation of myths in antiquity, and for the reception. Developing this idea, Svetlana Slapšak introduced the term *mythourgia* (the art of creating myths), borrowing it from scholiast Lycophron (*Schol. Lyc. 17*; Slapšak 2018, 364). “Myth is a story defined by context and technique of retelling and listening/reading; it does not explain, or standardize, it does not legitimate, or direct, it does not teach. It only gives pleasure and makes one retell it and think about it” (Slapšak 2013, 10) The term was accepted by the School representatives, while Ezio Pellizer, an Italian scholar close to the group, used it in the title of the annual conferences on myth (Slapšak 2018, 364).

Anthropology of Ancient Worlds and Research on Women

The methodological postulates of the School of anthropology of ancient worlds were open and adequate for introducing many topics that did not use to be in the focus of the classical scholars and one of those is research on women. The first scholar of the School who focused on the research on women and gender division roles was Nicole Loraux (Loraux 1993). Although her PhD thesis (*Athènes imaginaire. Histoire de l’oraison funèbre athénienne et de sa fonction dans la cité classique* 1977) and her first book (1981) were devoted to the *male* domain, or more precisely, to the men’s rhetorical genre of funeral oration – performed by men, about the glory of men, but also about the glory of Athens, precisely from this research developed her interest into death and related rituals, the domain that in ancient Athens belonged to women, except in cases when men made an effort to conquer this female sphere in the political arena, depriving women of their right to participate in the funeral ritual and to mourn. Closely related to these topics are issues of memory and forgetting, that also came into the research focus of this scholar (Loraux 1998, 2002). She was among the first researchers to investigate the blurred borders between feminine and masculine in the imaginary construction of identities (Loraux 1995). This interesting topic preoccupies other researchers as well, and an important contribution to this

domain is found in the work of Froma Zeitlin (an American researcher related to the School), and her theorizing feminine mechanisms in the functioning of drama and Athenian theatre, as a male institution (Zeitlin 1996). Although research on women and gender was not the exclusive interest of the School, the methodologies were adequate, and therefore exerted a remarkable influence on American Ancient Women Studies, which at first started from the premises of traditional historical and classical scholarship.¹² A further methodological influence is recognizable in the scholarly research and teaching of Svetlana Slapšak, who applied certain aspects of these methodologies to the research on Balkan women, shaping a new approach and a school of historical anthropology of gender in the Balkans (Stevanović 2020a, 165–169).

Classics and comparativism

One of the scholars who never stopped insisting on the comparative aspect in research and often theoretically argued for it is Marcel Detienne (1935–2019). Intensively advocating the intersection of history and anthropology, he thought even about the joint, teamwork of anthropologists and historians.¹³ “It is a comparativism that is both *experimental* and *constructive*” (Detienne 2007, 10). The methodology that Detienne suggests would thus include the questions, perspectives, and knowledge of different disciplines and researchers that would challenge each other, at the same time mutually respecting and learning from one another. He mentions an example of research when different historians and anthropologists questioned the phenomenon of *foundation* in different cultures. What came out of this is that Hellenists, Africanists, and Indologists came to such complex and varied conclusions, that they decided to redefine the question and conceptualization from which they started, concluding that it is more appropriate to discuss concepts of *inhabiting*, *establishing territory*, *being in a certain place* (Detienne 2007, 2010–2013). This research revealed that not only did the starting conceptualization have to be redefined, but also challenged the idea of having Greeks at the beginning of “our” world. Thus, Detienne concludes that the more different societies are compared, the better (Detienne 2008, 27). Such

¹² An exquisite example of minute historical and philological research is provided by Sarah Pomeroy in her work on Spartan women, revealing that the reason for the absence of research on women is not the lack of sources, but rather a lack of interest (Pomeroy 2002).

¹³ Marcel Detienne was born in Belgium. After his studies at the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE) and doctorate in Liège, he was appointed at EPHE. In the beginning of the 1990s he moved to the USA, to teach at the Department of Classics at Johns Hopkins University.

a method enables going over the boundaries of determined meanings, enabling us to put new questions and gain fresh perspectives.

Detienne reminds us that nineteenth-century anthropology used to be oriented towards comparativism. Apart from the fact that evolutionism was gradually dismissed, Detienne finds the reason for abandoning comparativism in the institutionalization of history as a national science. Quoting Emile Durkheim, he claims that “the task for professional historians on university payrolls...to establish ‘scientifically’ that all Great Nations depend inherently upon the manner of their genesis” excluded the possibility of comparativism (Detienne 2007, 4).

The influence of scholars gathered around Centre Louis Gernet has been felt far beyond the circles of French research into antiquity and French critical theory. As for Detienne, who exchanged EPHE for John Hopkins University, his influence as a professor at the Department of Classics was direct. However, the influence of the other researchers of the Circle has also been remarkable, hence my focus in the text will further move exactly towards the reception and influence of the school beyond the borders of France, first of all across La Manche and the Atlantic, and finally in this part of the world.

Found in Translation – The Gernet Centre and the Anglophone World

The first Anglophone classicist who turned to anthropology (influenced by Edmund Leach and Rodney Needham) and applied a type of Lévi-Strauss’ structural approach was Geoffrey Lloyd (1933), a professor of ancient philosophy at Cambridge.¹⁴ His thesis *Polarity and Analogy* was written in 1957, and published only in 1966. However, at that time, he was not aware of the work of the French school of anthropology of ancient worlds (Murray 2020, 145–146), but ever since he met for the first time Vernant and Naquet (1966), a deep friendship and mutual influences developed between them. Lloyd spent time in Paris, also as a guest lecturer in 1978. Also extremely important for the wider Franco-Anglophone dialogue in anthropology and classics was his wife, Janet Lloyd, who translated many significant books into English, e. g. Vernant and Naquet’s *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Detienne’s *The Gardens of Adonis* (1977), *Comparing the Incomparable* (2008), *The Greeks and Us* (2007), etc. The in-

¹⁴ Unfortunately, when I was writing the paper „Antropologija i antika: epistemološka razilaženja i susreti“ („Anthropology and Classics: Epistemological Divergences and Encounters“) I was not aware of the anthropological orientation of Geoffrey Lloyd and the direct influence on him by Edmund Leach and Rodney Needham. This paper seeks to explain why and how anthropologists and classicists had a dialogue in some periods, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the moment (Stevanović 2018).

fluence of the Paris school in Britain is also recognizable in the work of Oswyn Murray and Simon Goldhill, since the research of Greek theatre became forever influenced by the ideas of Vernant. One of the American scholars researching tragedy and therefore influenced by Vernant has been Charles Segal.

The bridge of the Paris school across the Atlantic was built mainly by Froma Zeitlin, a researcher who was engaged the most in the editing and translating of works by Vernant and Naquet in the USA. Affiliated to Princeton University, she maintained close professional and friendly relations with Jean-Pierre Vernant, and other colleagues at the Centre Louis Gernet, tightly cooperating with them, spending time in Paris, teaching there, even being a director of *d'Études Associé* at the Collège de France (1981–1982). Influenced mainly by Vernant, Froma Zeitlin applied in her research a certain type of structural and anthropological approach. One of the focuses of her structural research was the structure of ancient tragedies in which, as she argued, it is partly possible to research ancient women (Slapšak 1993, XIII). Her thesis is grounded in the perception of the functioning of tragedies, and all feminine mechanisms that characterize them. “Hence the final paradox may be that theatre uses the feminine for the purposes of imagining a fuller model for the masculine self, and “playing the other” opens that self to those often banned emotions of fear and pity” (Zeitlin 1996, 363). The brilliant and playful academic dialogue with Vernant is recognizable throughout her work, but as an illustration, I would like to mention her introduction to the collection of essays *Mortals and Immortals* by Jean-Pierre Vernant that Froma Zeitlin edited and translated (1992). There she points to the everlasting problem of an uncritical and colonial attitude towards the ancient Greek past, inspired by Vernant’s work on mirrors and Greek imagination:

Greek culture cannot serve as a mirror in which we unreflectively view ourselves and our own habits of thought and through which we translate back into another time and place those cognitive assumptions we have absorbed and ourselves transformed in the course of our own history. (Zeitlin 1991, 7)

Certainly the most important, Froma Zeitlin was not the only one who built a bridge between French and American academic scenes. The vibrant place in which the ideas and approaches of scholars from the Paris school were welcomed and received, important on the map of the creation of French-American dialogue in the approaches towards antiquity was John Hopkins University. I have already mentioned the famous Johns Hopkins conference in 1966 (*The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*), which Derrida termed “l’invasion structuraliste” referring generally to the important influence that French scholars applying structuralism had on the development of theoretical thought in the USA (Stocking 2000, 2). Although in the beginning the influence of researchers came from one direction, the further development of thoughts and

debates can only be termed as a dialog. The researchers travelled between continents, changing their working surroundings, reading and discussing similar problems, enriching perspectives and a variety of themes and approaches, mutually influencing each other.¹⁵ Marcel Detienne, a Belgian born scholar who together with Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre-Vidal Naquet was shaping the French school of anthropology of ancient worlds working on the legacy of Gernet's thought, held the position of professor at Johns Hopkins University from 1992 until 2007. François Lissarrague, also a significant representative of the school who focused on iconography analysis (of painted vases) spent the last years of his working career (2004–2007) at Berkley. Gregory Nagy, professor of classics at Harvard University also maintained close academic relations with the representatives of the Centre Louis Gernet. Examples are numerous and it is not possible to mention all of them (both researchers and common projects), but maybe the most illustrative for understanding the mutual influences and debates between scholars of American and Paris academia is the book, the exceptional collection of essays on Greek tragedy and comedy in the social context. Undoubtedly this work has been influenced by and based on the aforementioned ideas on theatre by Vernant and Naquet. The book was edited by John J. Winkler and Froma Zeitlin, and published for the first time in the year 1990 by Princeton University under the title *Nothing to do with Dionysos*.¹⁶ The title itself problematizes the old Athenian proverb interpreted differently already in antiquity, and referring in the first place to the growing complexity and innovation of dramatic performances, as if they were distancing themselves from the god Dionysos and the cult they belonged to. Researchers that contributed to this book come mostly from France and the USA (John Winkler, Froma Zeitlin, Nicole Loraux, David Konstan, François Lissarrague, Josiah Ober and Barry Straus, Jeffrey Henderson, James Redfield, Ruth Padel, Jasper Svenbro and Niall W. Slater), but also from Italy (Odone Longo), where the influence of the Gernet classicists is also strong. Among them one should also mention Page DuBois and Charles Segal from the US, but also two British-based researchers, one exceptionally important for the research of ancient theatre – Simon Goldhill, and the poet and classicist Ruth Padel.

¹⁵ Marcel Detienne, who together with Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre-Vidal Naquet was shaping innovation of the French school of anthropology of ancient worlds working on the legacy of Gernet's thought, held the position of professor at Johns Hopkins University from 1992 until 2007.

¹⁶ Side by side with this publication, in a similar dialogue and intellectual exchange, appeared the collection of papers *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, edited by David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma Zeitlin, Princeton University Press 1990.

Anthropology of Ancient Worlds in the Former Yugoslavia

The translating of works of Gernet's classicist started in Yugoslavia during the 1980s,¹⁷ and at the same time the approach gradually started to influence Yugoslav scholars. One of the first papers that resonated with the structuralist orientation of the School was written by Dubravko Škiljan (1984), a linguist – a semiologist, and a classical philologist, while his argumentation stems directly from his research interests. Explaining the starting positions of semiology as an approach to researching signs, he understands antiquity as a semiological system, suggesting that research has to be oriented towards our own ideological “filters”, but also towards the ideological “filters” of antiquity, while insights are to be found precisely in the mutual comparison (and incoherence) of differently contextualized meanings (Škiljan 1984, 7–8). Škiljan also warns that the layers of ancient meanings are numerous, that they were gradually created by time, and that they all participate in our reception of antiquity (Škiljan 1984, 8). Another active associate of the Centre Louis Gernet is Svetlana Slapšak, a Belgrade-born classicist, living and teaching in Ljubljana.¹⁸ Representatives of the Gernet School were regular guest lecturers at the programme (Jean-Pierre Vernant, Françoise Frontisi-Ducorox, François Lissarrague, Claude Mossé, Stella Georgoudi, Éveline Scheid-Tissnier, John Scheid), even sometimes through intensive courses (Slapšak 2000, 70)¹⁹ and the supervision of doctoral

¹⁷ The first translation of a book by a representative of the Centre Louis Gernet was Pierre-Vidal-Naquet's book *Le chasseur noir*, which appeared in Ljubljana in 1985. In the same year, the first translations into Serbian of two texts by Vernant appeared in Novi Sad, in the journal *Letopis Matice srpske* (1985) – a chapter from *Origines de pensée grecque* and *Le Cuisine de sacrifice en pays Grec*. The foreword was written by Darinka Zličić and Svetlana Slapšak. This was not the end of the translation of books by Vernant and Vidal-Naquet. Only a year later, Vernant's book *Les origines de la pensée grecque* appeared in Slovenian (*Začetki grške misli*), and four years later in Serbian (*Poreklo grčke misli* 1990), followed by a translation of *Myth et tragédie en Grèce Ancienne (Mit i tragedija u antičkoj Grčkoj I i II*, 1993, 1995). The list of translated books continues, but there is no space to mention them all.

¹⁸ At the conference *Relire Jean-Pierre Vernant*, organized a year after his death (by Centre Louis Gernet, le Collège de France, l'École pratique des hautes études and l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales) Svetlana Slapšak devoted her presentation to the reception of Vernant's thought in Yugoslavia and Slovenia (Slapšak 2018, 361–370). The paper was published 10 years later in the collection of papers from the conference, edited by Stella Georgoudi and François de Polignac (Georgoudi, Polignac 2018).

¹⁹ Related to this program and lectures, another two books appeared in 2000, the first as an introduction to the School with the title *For the Anthropology of Ancient Worlds (Za antropologijo antičnih svetov)*, and the other *Image, View, Meaning (Pod-*

theses²⁰. Almost all of them came from Paris and were related to the Gernet Centre, except for Dubravko Škiljan who was at that time teaching the course Semiology of Antiquity at the same faculty. Another guest lecturer was Mary Beard, the famous English classicist, a professor of Roman history and ancient literature, a frequent and engaged guest in British media who often warns of the still very popular misuse of antiquity, and lectures on antiquity addressing a wide audience.

Following the aforementioned postulates of the French school of anthropology of ancient worlds, Svetlana Slapšak introduced another important methodological request – completely corresponding to the other postulates – and that is saving from oblivion scholars whose ideas were similar to those of the School and useful for further research, but who were not sufficiently known in international academic circles, mostly due to the language barriers and specific political circumstances. This is an extremely important task, because it remedies injustice and makes the work of these scholars visible in international circles, dealing with another type of marginalization (this time inside academia), comparing ideas and argumentation with their contemporaries and even much younger scholars. A scholar whom I would like to mention is Olga Freidenberg (1890–1950)²¹, a Russian classicist and folklorist of ancient Greek culture, who had a similar methodological position as the Gernet School. Namely, she was aware of the different meanings of phenomena in our and Greek culture, researching the development of thought, as well as the emergence of Greek literature from rituals. Her approach to cognitive development, which she relates to social changes (Freidenberg 1997, 20, 25), might enter into dialogue with Vernant's search into the development of Greek rationality and its separation from religious thinking (Vernant 1982, 11). However, the focus of Freidenberg's research was on artistic concepts and their relation to mythological images, while Vernant focused on the political life of the Greek polis. It is interesting to mention that Freidenberg also criticized Freud and his *anti-historical* approach

ba, Pomen, Pogle.) – a collection of texts translated into Slovenian, written by visiting lecturers during the first year of the program, in the courses taught by Svetlana Slapšak (Anthropology of everyday life in antiquity, Anthropology of public and private in ancient Greece and Rome and Anthropology of religion in ancient Greece and Rome).

²⁰ Among researchers who continued working in the methodological orientation of the School are classicists and anthropologists Darja Šterbenc, Maja Sunčič, and Lada Stevanović, all developing specific methodologies in the wide field of anthropology of ancient worlds.

²¹ Worth mentioning is that the work of this scholar was translated into Serbian in 1987, and that only ten years later, the first English translation appeared (*Image and Concept: Mythopoeic Roots of Literature*), better known in the circle of Slavonic than classical scholars.

to the myth of Oedipus and his general ignoring of the fact that ancient Greek sexuality was not marked by shame and guilt, wherefore it may not be related to Freud's ideas about emphasized and suppressed sexuality (Frejdenberg 1997, 28; Stevanović 2020, 106–107). The immense and original work of this scholar still waits to enter into dialogue with the researches of the Gernet Centre.

Conclusion

The fact that the French school of anthropology of ancient worlds did not develop from the tradition of French classicists, but rather from distancing and “breaking” with this tradition, with a strong influence of anthropology, sociology, and a combination of different theories and approaches, might explain why it still appears as a method not accepted by all approaches to classical antiquity. However, some influences are impossible to erase. The current development of the research of theatre, as well as research of women and gender, and other alterities (race, slaves, children, etc.) in antiquity would be different if Gernet's classicists were not there to go down unknown paths of different theories and methodologies. However, even though not all the theories, approaches, and argumentations in this (or any other) field might be proven or right, the huge contribution of the abovementioned approach is the demand for contextualization, for the constant changing and multiplying of perspectives (but also the change of focus), as well as an effort on the part of researchers to self-position themselves. All this enriches our views of cultures distant in time and space, leading us to a more complex understanding and exciting debates about the past but also about contemporariness (and our view of the past), gradually increasing our knowledge and points of view. After all, this is the goal of the humanities.

Some conservative ideas about the ancient past still prevail, both in some parts of academia as well as in public discourses. A popular idea about Greece as the cradle of European civilization strongly resists insights about ancient Greeks as different from us, as *alterity*, because this challenges the already mentioned Western idea about its own glorious past. Although not the exclusive approach to classics that challenges such views, the French school of anthropology of ancient worlds has left us the legacy of playful, but always solid research, requiring an enormous appreciation of knowledge, but also the requirement to abandon a rigid and stable way of thinking.

And while the global world we live in is fragmented, often in quite isolated worldviews that do not mutually communicate, the same is found in contemporary attitudes towards Greek and Roman antiquity. Side by side, we find extremely interesting and challenging transdisciplinary paths and views on the complex ancient past. Besides that, there are approaches to antiquity that are

narrowly focused or popular views that are simplistic and burdened with ideological inscriptions. Are these different views the ambiguity of our time, similar to the ambiguity of Greek rational and mythical thought that Vernant discussed?

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*Klasici između disciplina i teorija:
antropologija Starog sveta*

U tekstu je predstavljen rad Francuske antropološke škole antičkih svetova koji se negovao u Centru Luj Žerne u Parizu, nazvanom po pioniru ove škole. Epistemološki obrt u istraživanjima antike posledica je transdisciplinarnosti ostvarene preplitanjem antičkih studija, istorije, sociologije i različitih kritičkih teorija. Ova promena ne ostavlja se isključivo upotrebom različitih metodoloških paradigmi, već i fokusom na različite teme i fenomene koji se posmatraju u konkretnom socio-političkom i kulturnom kontekstu. Najznačajniji predstavnici prve generacije ove škole bili su Žan-Pjer Vernan, Pjer Vidal-Naquet, Marsel Detjen i Nikol Loro (Jean-Pierre Vernant, Piere Vidal-Naquet, Marcel Detienne, Nicole Loraux). Brojne njihove knjige i tekstovi pojavili su se i u prevodu na druge jezike, a Centar Luj Žerne bio je živo mesto intelektualne razmene i inovativnih pristupa antici koje su posećivali naučnici iz različitih delova sveta, naročito u toku 1970ih i 1980ih godina. To je vodilo izuzetno interesantnom dijalogu i međusobnim uticajima koji su se odvijali i van granica Francuske. U ovom radu bavim se kratkim predstavljanjem recepcije ove škole u anglofonom svetu kao i na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije upravo kako bih ukazala na poneke intelektualne putanje razmene ideja.

Ključne reči: Centar Luj Žerne, antropologija antičkih svetova, metodologije, teorije, teme, recepcija

*Les classiques entre disciplines et théories:
anthropologie des mondes anciens*

Dans ce texte est présenté le travail de l'école anthropologique française des mondes antiques conduit au Centre Louis Gernet à Paris, centre baptisé d'après le pionnier de cette école. Le tournant épistémologique dans les recherches sur l'Antiquité est la conséquence de la transdisciplinarité réalisée par le croisement des études antiques, de l'histoire, de la sociologie et de différentes théories critiques. Ce changement ne s'accomplit pas exclusivement par l'utilisation des paradigmes méthodologiques variés, mais aussi par la focalisation sur les différents thèmes et phénomènes qui sont observés dans le contexte socio-politique et culturel concret. Les représentants les plus importants de la première génération de cette école ont été Jean-Pierre Vernant, Piere Vidal-Naquet, Marcel Detienne, Nicole Loraux. Leurs nombreux livres et textes ont également paru

dans des traductions en d'autres langues, et le Centre Louis Gernet a été un endroit vivant d'échanges intellectuels et d'approches innovatives de l'Antiquité que visitaient des savants des différentes parties du monde, notamment au cours des années soixante-dix et quatre-vingt du siècle dernier. Cela a fait naître un dialogue extrêmement intéressant et des influences mutuelles en France et en dehors de ses frontières. Dans le présent travail je fais une brève présentation de la réception de cette école dans le monde anglophone ainsi que sur l'espace de l'ex-Yougoslavie pour ainsi rendre compte de certains courants d'échanges des idées.

Mots clés: Centar Louis Gernet, anthropologie des mondes antiques, méthodologies, théories, thèmes, réception

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