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Words to Remember - Women and the Origin of the “Words of Institution”

To Ellen Bradshaw Aitken (1961-2014)¹

Abstract

In der gegenwärtigen Forschung wird zu Recht gesehen, dass das frühchristliche Mahl der Form des durchaus religiös bedeutsamen Symposiums folgt. Die ersten Christen und Christinnen trafen sich zum gemeinsamen Mahl, weil dies die typische Form antiker Gruppenbildung war. Was dieses kulturgeschichtliche Deutungsmuster jedoch nicht erklären kann, ist die Entstehung und Funktion der sogenannten Einsetzungsworte (1 Korinther 11,23–26; Markus 14,22–25; Matthäus 26,26–29; Lukas 22,15–20). Der Beitrag möchte die Hypothese plausibilisieren, dass die in der Antike vor allem von Frauen vorgetragene Totenklage der ursprüngliche Sitz im Leben der Einsetzungsworte ist. Dazu wird zunächst gezeigt, dass die älteste Tradition, 1 Korinther 11,23–26, ein Fragment bleibt und Erzählungen von Leiden und Sterben Jesu voraussetzt. Mit der Gedächtnisformel und den Mahlelementen Brot und Wein knüpfen die Worte, wie seit langem gesehen wurde, an antike Totengedächtnisfeiern an. Zu solchen Totengedächtnisfeiern gehört als Medium der Erinnerung die Totenklage. Diese überall in der Antike von Frauen ausgeübte Totenklage lässt sich allerdings nur durch eine Kombination von modernen ethnografischen Beobachtungen mit antiken Zeugnissen rekonstruieren. Mit der Form der Totenklage teilen die Einsetzungsworte das Sprechen aus der Perspektive des Verstorbenen und die mit dem Verstorbenen geteilte Speise. Die Einsetzungsworte, so die hier formulierte Hypothese, wurden aus den Totenklagen um Jesus in dramatisch erzählten Passionserzählungen kondensiert und später selbstständig überliefert.

Meals create communities. From their earliest days, communities of those who believed in Christ were no exception to this rule. Recent research into the origins of the Eucharist has focused on the analogous customs of Greco-Roman banquets, and not on the so-called “Words of Institution”.² In the words of Dennis

“Early Christians met at a meal because that is what groups in the ancient world did. Christians were simply following a pattern found throughout their world [... They] celebrated a meal based on the banquet model found commonly in their world. [...] Banquet ideology provided a model for creating community, defining behavior within the community, sharing values, and connecting with the divine. It was also embedded in a social practice and so provided a means for the ideology to be confirmed through a shared experience.”³

We might of course ask whether banquets and symposia in the Greek and Roman world did in fact follow a uniform social pattern,⁴ but scholars are nonetheless correct in identifying overtly religious components, such as prayers and libation, at many of these shared meals. Thus, spirituality at meals can no longer be considered a uniquely Jewish and Christian phenomenon. New insights into form, participants, etiquette and the liturgy of early Christian meals reveal above all the pluralistic and multiform practice of the celebration of banquets in various Jewish and Christian groups; or as Ellen Aitken put it:

“Meal practice was one of the locations or matrices for the formation and transmission of Jesus-Tradition as utterances, authoritative speech-acts, or performance within the community.”⁵

What remains to be seen, however, is how the famous “Words of Institution”, found four times in the gospels and in Paul, were used at such meals. Although Smith argues:

“It cannot be read as a script for liturgical action, unless one can imagine someone in the community acting out the part of Jesus in some kind of divine drama, which seems unlikely.”⁶

I ask, is it quite impossible that someone could have acted out the part of Jesus in speaking these words in his name? In what follows I want to examine the socio-historical contexts in which the “Words of Institution” originated and were performed at community meals. I will argue that those words indeed are part of a performance that actualizes a “divine drama” in which the speaker Jesus “comes back to life”. To make my case, I will refer to mortuary practices, which, as I will argue, contain forms of speech and ritualized eating, which are able to mediate between the realms of the dead and the living. But first I have to explain why I place the “Words of Institution” into a funerary context at all. I thus ask: What can we know about the origin and *Sitz im Leben* of those words Paul passed on to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11

1. Origin and *Sitz im Leben* of the so-called “Words of Institution”

The simplest answer to the question of the origin of the “Words of Institution” would of course be a direct attribution to the historical Jesus. At his last meal shared with his disciples in Jerusalem he is said to have spoken these words, which they then remembered following the events of Easter.⁷ Yet what could Jesus have meant by these words? In his influential explanation Joachim Jeremias sets Jesus’ words within the context of the Passover liturgy.⁸ This is the evening on which the Evangelists date Jesus’ last supper. According to the Passover liturgy, the bread (*matzah*), bitter herbs (*maror*) and lamb (*pesach*) are given special significance in retelling the story of the Exodus from Egypt.⁹ Likewise Jesus at his last meal gave new significance to the food and thus transformed the whole meal into a parable of his approaching death. In Jeremias’ words:

“Jesus made the broken bread a simile of the fate of his body, the blood of the grapes a simile of his outpoured blood. ‘I go to death as the true Passover sacrifice’, is the meaning of Jesus’ last parable.”¹⁰

Nevertheless, differences between the Passover meal and the Last Supper can be detected immediately.¹¹ In the Passover meal, it is the various special elements of the menu – the unleavened bread, herbs and lamb – that are assigned particular significance; in the Last Supper, it is the standard elements of bread and wine. More noteworthy is the complete lack of any hint at the Passover in the “Words of Institution”. The link is only to be found in the context assigned to the meal by the author of the Gospel of Mark.¹² Paul does not refer to the Passover meal in any meal context.

Yet, with his reference to the Passover liturgy, Jeremias made two important observations: Firstly, the significance assigned to the food indicates a narrative context, whether that of the Exodus, or of the death of Jesus, without which the symbolic speech would be incomprehensible. Secondly, the greatest puzzle is how the speaker can designate the food shared at the meal as symbolic of himself. The quest for the original *Sitz-im-Leben* of the “Words of Institution” must, I feel, begin with these two insights.

The first clue may be found in the oldest known literary formulation of the words, quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26:

“11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was handed over took a loaf of bread, 11:24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ 11:25 In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in

remembrance of me.’ 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.’¹³

Paul refers to the words as a tradition that he had shared with the Corinthians during his first visit around 50 CE. His ultimate source is the Lord (*kyrios*).¹⁴ Thus, Paul himself must have received the tradition either in direct divine revelation or through the Antioch community; one possibility does not, of course, rule out the other.¹⁵

Paul’s tradition of the “Words of Institution” refers to the night that Jesus was handed over to the authorities.¹⁶ This means that it presupposes the narration of Jesus’ passion. Paul’s “Words of Institution” are only part of that story, a *story fragment*. To understand this fragment, one requires the appropriate context. Characters are barely introduced, and the night’s events are never really explained. But it is an interesting story fragment, because it contains more action and direct speech than narration. If one found such a story-fragment on papyrus, one would probably assume that it must belong to a decisive moment, a turning point in the storyline. Paul’s account of the meal forms a dramatic climax to the community’s narration of that fateful night and its consequences.¹⁷ In v 26, which probably reports Paul’s own words, it becomes clear that the whole event is a community proclamation of the death of Jesus. In other words, with their meal the community itself is acting out the decisive part of the narrative that is evoked by the story of the night it refers to. But what is the character of that meal described in Paul’s tradition?

2. Paul’s Eucharistic formula and funerary banquets

It is not only the implied passion account, but even the words themselves that designate the meal as a “wake” or “funerary banquet”. The words τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν (1 Corinthians 11:24f) are well attested in various memorials to the deceased:

I (Aurelius Festus) donate and bequeath silver denarii to the village of the Rakeloi under the condition that they celebrate my memory ([ἐπὶ τῷ] τοῦτο ποιεῖν αὐτοῦς ἀνά[μ]νη[σ]ί) within the neighborhood of Dradizane.¹⁸

A meal of bread and wine is associated with mourning rituals in the Hebrew tradition; thus Jeremiah 16:6 (LXX):

“They shall not lament for them, [...]. And bread (ἄρτος) shall not be broken (κλασθῆ) in their mourning, for comfort over the dead; they shall not make him drink a cup (ποτιῶσιν ποτήριον) of comfort over his father and mother.”¹⁹

Finally, the procedure for memorials and shared meals is also to be found in classical obsequies.²⁰ An inscription found at Satafis (Ain el Kebira) in the province Mauretania Sitifensis in North Africa from 299 CE reads:

To the memory of Aelia Secundula
 We all sent many worthy things for her funeral.
 Further near the altar dedicated to mother Secundula,
 It pleases us to place a stone table
 On which we placing food and covered cups,
 Remember her many great deeds.
 In order to heal the savage wound gnawing at our breast,
 We freely recount stories at the late hour,
 And give praises to the good and chaste mother, who sleeps in her old age.
 She, who nourished us, lies soberly forever.
 She lived to be seventy-five years of age, and died in the 250th year of the province.
 Made by Stulenia Julia.²¹

Stulenia Julia and her relatives evidently set up a table with food and drinks and recalled the great deeds of her mother, told stories about her after her death and praised her. Whether this means free narration or formal dirges, or a combination of both, we cannot know. Yet both antiquity and modernity attest to the practice of lamentation/wailing at the grave, followed by a shared meal. Thus according to Stears:

“The funeral itself was not the only occasion at which laments might be sung: ethnographic comparison suggests that they may have been performed in non-funerary contexts, such as when toiling in the fields or wool working. But perhaps a more certain retelling of these familial histories within lamentation came at the monthly and annual visits to the tomb site.”²²

One may ask though: What do we now about the earliest practices of lamenting and remembering the death and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth?

3. Jesus’ Passion and Women’s Lamentations

There is ample evidence of mourning rituals in the New Testament.²³ After her death, Tabitha is laid out in her house and the widows keen over her (Acts 9:37.39). Loud weeping, wailing and flute music is heard in the house of the recently deceased daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:38–39 *par.*). Mary and Martha’s neighbors come to the house of mourning to console them (John

11:17) and accompany the sorrowing Mary to the tomb.²⁴ Many follow in the funeral procession for the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:13). At the burial of Stephen, pious men raise a loud lament (Acts 8:2).

Despite the resurrection, there are even some references to mourning practices in the passion stories.²⁵ Jesus' body is washed and anointed twice, at Bethany (Mark 14:3–9 / Matthew 26:6–13 / John 12:1–8) by a woman and at Jerusalem, this time by males (Mark 15:42–47 *par.*).²⁶ The latter detail might seem surprising, given the general tendency in Antiquity to assign the preparation of the corpse for burial to women.²⁷ Women are in any case present at Jesus' burial (Mark 15:47 *par.*) and visit the tomb on the third day (Mark 16:1 *par.*). In Mark, the women come to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1), in Matthew "to see the tomb" (Matthew 28:1) and in Luke they bring spices, which could represent an offering for the dead at the place of the burial (Luke 23:56–24:1). John has Mary Magdalene weeping and wailing at the tomb (John 20:11). Marianne Sawicki assumes that these stories echo a substantive passion narrative originating with women.²⁸

In the *Gospel of Peter*, Mary Magdalene comes with her women friends to the tomb "to do what women were accustomed to do for the dead beloved by them" (*Gospel of Peter* 12:50). They try to enter the tomb "in order to sit beside him and do the expected things" (*Gospel of Peter* 12:53). But should that be impossible, they want at least to "throw against the door what we bring in memory of him" (*Gospel of Peter* 12:54). The *Gospel of Peter* does not say what they have with them. The Synoptics suggest ointment, oil, and spices, but in Antiquity, flowers, milk and honey or, in Jewish contexts, bread and wine, would be the offering most likely to come to a reader's mind.²⁹

Aitken wrote:

"How women are remembered in early Christian tradition helps us to understand their role as those who remember, that is, as the producers and transmitters of authoritative speech acts and narratives within the context of early Christian meals."³⁰

Indeed, there are at least some suggestions in the New Testament that Christians continued the practice of mourning for Jesus in the first century CE, although the location of Jesus' grave, if it existed at all, was presumably not even known to his friends.³¹ In view of the early Christian practices of venerating martyrs at gravesites, it would seem unlikely that the location of the ultimate martyr Jesus would have been entirely forgotten and could only be relocated 300 years later, through a vision of Helene, Constantine's mother. Since, as modern martyrdom cults demonstrate, the presence of an actual grave is dispensable to the lamenters who have none³² with or without a grave, Jesus' death must have had the same effect on his disciples.

We do have an early tradition according to which Jesus rose on Easter Sunday.³³ As Kathleen

Corley has argued, the custom shared by women of all ethnic and religious backgrounds in Antiquity, of visiting tombs on the third day after a burial, gave rise to the formula “raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4).³⁴ But some stories have the risen one appearing to his disciples fishing some days or even weeks later, and not in Jerusalem but rather in Galilee.³⁵ Much later, the Gospel of John still remembers a time in which mourning rather than the joy of Easter was the prevailing emotion: “Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn (κλαύσετε καὶ θρηνήσετε), but the world will rejoice; you will have pain (λυπηθήσεσθε John 16:20 BNT), but your pain (ἡ λύπη ὑμῶν) will turn into joy” (John 16:20).

The question of whether and to what extent the experience of mourning, lamenting and loss had affected the passion accounts, we read in the Gospels of Mark and John, has been debated. Obviously, the written passion accounts incorporated many motifs from Psalms of Lament, such as 22, 34 or 69.³⁶ Mark and John’s passion narratives are at least in part modeled on these Psalms, which give vent to individual lament.³⁷ Unfortunately we do not know much about the *Sitz im Leben* of these Psalms in Antiquity, or whether they were used in ancient Jewish mortuary practices.³⁸ Corley argues that some oral lamentation traditions about Jesus’ death may have been transmitted by early Christian men and women. However, as the passion narrative of Mark reflects no such traditions (such as antiphonal patterns or addresses to the dead), this passion tradition had, in her opinion, been lost.³⁹ While she imagines a group of male and female oral poets telling and retelling the story of Jesus’ passion and death — and thereby influencing the narrative line and poetic sections of the written accounts — Dominic Crossan envisions a gender gap between female lamenters and male scribes, the latter of whom are, in his view, the sole authors of the written accounts.⁴⁰ It was female “ritual lament ... that changed prophetic exegesis into a biographical story,” and “wove exegetical fragments into a sequential story,”⁴¹ but only male scribes shaped the earliest written passion account, the “Cross Gospel” upon which the *Gospel of Peter*, as well as those of Mark and John, was based. Thus for Crossan, our written passion narratives do no longer contain laments or women’s tradition.

Yet mourning and laments did not totally die out when various Christian groups and individuals in different places came to know the crucified one as the risen Christ through vision, experience or reasoning.⁴² As Aitken has demonstrated, traditions like 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 as well as the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13–27 presuppose a narrative of Jesus’ passion: There was a need to recount Jesus’ crucifixion in order to make his resurrection meaningful.⁴³ If those who believed in Christ wanted to convince others of the resurrection, they could not stick with short formulas like ‘Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, was buried and raised’ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3–5). Hence, there must have been expanded narratives about Jesus’ death. In other words, there is a direct interconnection between the “Words of Institution” cited by Paul and oral versions of a passion account.

Therefore in the next section I will ask: Were the “Words of Institution” influenced by mortuary rites and laments?

4. The Lamentor as a Mediator of the Deceased’s Voice.

The tradition related by Paul to the Corinthian community describes the sequence of events at a memorial meal, in which memory of the deceased and a shared meal are inexorably linked. Yet here, the one who is being remembered appears himself and speaks. Whether the late mother of Stulenia Julia was considered present at her memorial banquet we cannot say. Yet parallels in antiquity suggest that the presence of the deceased could constitute part of the experience of the meal. According to Artemidorus’ handbook on the interpretation of dreams, a vision in which one invites others to a great *symposium* is a premonition of one’s own death. “For it is customary for those who live together to go to the house of the deceased and to dine there. And it is said that the reception is given by the deceased.”⁴⁴ In Petronius’ satirical banquet, the late-arriving guest apologizes by saying he was taking part in a meal for the dead and comments: “But anyhow it was a pleasant affair, even if we did have to pour half our drinks over his lamented bones.”⁴⁵ Lucian mocks the practice of feeding the dead “so that if anyone has not left a friend or kinsman behind him on earth, he goes about his business there as an unfed corpse, in a state of famine.”⁴⁶ Thus, a funerary banquet celebrated by the Jerusalem friends of Jesus after his death or elsewhere in remembrance of this situation would be a meal held in the presence of Jesus.⁴⁷ Yet it is reasonable to inquire how he could be represented as an actor in the event and as speaker of the “Words of Institution”.

My hypothesis is that women’s laments might be the missing link in answering the question, although we face here a fundamental gap between what might be described as oral and scriptural cultures. Ritual songs of lament are part of oral culture, which undoubtedly existed but is almost completely undocumented in literary sources.⁴⁸

In cross-cultural studies, Hedwig Jahnow, Margaret Alexiou and Gail Holst-Warhaft have attempted to fill this gap through fieldwork in modern ethnography. Their goal was to outline the developments and continuities in such expressions of mourning, especially through lamentations performed by women.⁴⁹ Such trans-historical and transcultural comparisons and constructions of a history of tradition might be seen as problematic today, because they can blur cultural differences and local customs. In addition ethnography does not simply open up the experience of those involved in foreign cultures, since the ethnographer has to interpret his or her field observations and interviews.⁵⁰ But one can also argue, with Sally C. Humphreys, that

“the combination of history and social anthropology [...] means a conscious recognition that the historian not only uses the technique of *Verstehen* to interpret

sources and enter into the perception of actors in a foreign culture, but must also recreate imaginatively the material and institutional scenery which the anthropologist in the field can experience directly.”⁵¹

Therefore, interviews and ethnographic fieldwork can be useful in imaginative recreation of ancient experiences if there is some support in the fieldwork evidence drawn from ancient written sources.⁵² For Alexiou, Holst-Warhaft et al. interviews conducted with professional mourners in rural Greece allow insights into experiences, which remain inaccessible in ancient literature. Modern lamenters for instance point to a similar sentiment to that of Stulenia Julia, where songs of lament help them “heal the savage wound gnawing at our breast”.

Laments found in literary works such as epics and dramas provide a reflection of this culture, yet are not direct representations of it. Alexiou et al. were able to identify several structural elements which ancient lament has in common with modern evidence. The lament for Hector at the end of the Iliad (24,722–777) is, for example, constructed as an antiphony (which can also be observed in modern laments⁵³): Andromache, Hecuba and Helen, three of his closest female relatives, lead the song, to which the rest of the townswomen join in chorus. Each begins with an invocation of the deceased. Hector’s mother Hecuba contrasts the divine beauty of her son with the particularly gruesome death he suffered: “You, when he had taken your life with the thin edge of the bronze sword, he dragged again and again around his beloved companion’s tomb, Patroklos, whom you killed, but even so did not bring him back to life” (24,754–756). The moment of death and the act of dying itself are still important themes in many modern laments. However in Homer it is not, as in many modern examples, a protest against the injustice of death, but rather purely an indication of the beauty of the late Hector, and thus serves a higher purpose. As Christine Perkell concludes: “Hekabe’s lament [...] focuses on the fact that Hektor’s body bears no signs of heroic struggle, treatment to his piety and to the god’s love.”⁵⁴

Modern lamentations also include records of suffering. Thus the song of lament performed by Chrysa Kalliakati⁵⁵ in Crete and recorded by Anna Caraveli-Chaves (1979) during an interview, contains repeated appeals to the mother (Lines 21, 41, 43). The singer contrasts the suffering her mother endured as a young widow with her abilities as a midwife and healer (Lines 5–12). Just as in Homer, the lament is constructed as an antiphony, and the women of the village of Dzermiathes are invited to join in with the lament (Lines 15f). From Line 17 the focus on suffering intensifies; the singer finds her mother nowhere; the holy places which she visits and the prayers she offers cannot help her mother (Lines 23–34). Finally, despite being conscious of her mother’s death, she imagines meeting her again:

Line 35 “On the coming Sunday, I will go to church (36) to see my mother start to come, to give myself some hope (37)... I will stand aside (38) to see you pass, mother, carrying a tall candle (38) holding your child in your arms, leading him to communion, (39) leaning to kiss the icon, bowing down to it.”⁵⁶

This reunion is seen both as a vision of the future and a memory of things past, a mimetic coupling of experience and hope. As Caraveli-Chaves emphasizes:

“Laments bridge and mediate between vital realms of existence: life and death, the physical and the metaphysical, present and past, temporal and mythic time. The lamenter becomes the medium through whom the dead speaks to the living, the shaman who leads the living to the underworld and back, thus effecting a communal confrontation with death and through it, a catharsis. In her capacity as a mediator between realms, the lamenter affects the entire community.”⁵⁷

In some laments, the deceased can even speak in the first person through the mouths of the lamenter. She or he addresses those bereaved with a last word of farewell:

“Don’t let my wife or my poor grandchildren hear you. Don’t tell them that I am dead. Just tell them that I have married and taken a good wife. I have taken the tombstone as my mother-in-law, the black earth as my wife and I have the little pebbles as brothers-and-sisters-in-law.”⁵⁸

I am not aware of scenes of reunion and address in the first person as the deceased from ancient laments;⁵⁹ but they are to be found in another form of mortuary practice in antiquity, namely grave inscriptions and epitaphs. Alongside those which present the deceased with the words “This is the grave of...” and those in which the bereaved address the deceased with their own words, we have inscriptions dating back to the sixth century BCE in which the deceased speaks in the first person:

“Greetings, passers-by! I, Antistates, son of Atarbus, lie here in death, having left my native land.”⁶⁰

Sometimes the reader is invited to share in mourning while passing by:

“Whoever was not present when I died and they carried me out, let him lament me now: it is the tomb of Telephanes.”⁶¹

And sometimes one finds dialogues between the dead and the living, or the tombstone and the passer-by.⁶² Finally, the reader of a grave epitaph may also be encouraged to offer some food or drink to the deceased, as in the case of a Roman sarcophagus from the second century CE:

“[...] whoever reads this inscription, [which] I have made for me and for her, let him pour unmixed wine for Titus Aelius Euangelus, a patient man.”⁶³

In antiquity reading was performed aloud, so grave-epigrams become the spoken word when read. In such cases where the deceased directly addresses the reader, it is the reader who thus lends his voice to the deceased. If and how such epigrams relate to laments is debated. Paul Friedländer argues that: “it is not impossible [...] that [...] the epitaph originally mirrored elegies of mourning that were sung to the flute at or after the burials of the great.”⁶⁴ Joseph W. Day suggests that “[a]nyone reading these inscriptions takes on the role of one singing the dirge, and so a mimesis of the funerary ritual is performed.”⁶⁵ Katharine Derderian argues that the inscribed epitaph exists “as a durable verbal and material memorial following and marking the completion of death ritual” and therefore the “retrospective documentation” of its completion.⁶⁶ Yet even for her,

“though epigram differs from lament in its function as a record of the stable identity of the dead, it also both appropriates aspects of lament by standing in as an emblem of mourning at the gravesite, while also serving as a supplementary genre that looks back at the ephemeral lament.”⁶⁷

Whatever the concrete connection between oral laments, dirges or eulogies at the graveside and the epigrams and inscriptions on tombstones might have been, there must have been an “inherent connection between the spoken and written forms”.⁶⁸ And while abbreviation and compression were necessary due to the limited space on a tombstone, modern parallels allow us to suppose that a first-person speech from the deceased was also possible in antiquity.⁶⁹ Songs of lament as part of the passion account, the implied context of Paul’s tradition of the last supper, could indeed, I propose, have taken the form of “someone in the community acting out the part of Jesus”.⁷⁰ While I found no parallel symbolism of the deceased as bread and wine,⁷¹ the identification of bread and body might not be the only or most logical interpretation of the Greek text in 1 Corinthians 11:23f. The neuter demonstrative pronoun τούτο (this) in τούτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα (this is my body, 1 Corinthians 11:24) does not correspond to the masculine noun ὁ ἄρτος (bread). Rather the neuter “this” (τούτο) would more readily refer to the action of “took, gave thanks, broke”.⁷² If this was intended by the tradition Paul is citing here, then the experience of sharing the bread and wine becomes comparable to that of those taking part in the wakes examined by Loring Danford in his

ethnography field studies:

“Women in Potamia hold that the food distributed at memorial services somehow finds its way to the other world, where it is eaten by the dead. They say that the distribution of food takes place ‘so that the dead may eat’ and ‘whatever you give out becomes available for the dead’! Just as the body of the dead must be destroyed or eaten by the earth in order to pass into the other world, so the food distributed at memorial services must be consumed in order for it to reach the dead. Those who eat the food handed out by the relatives of the deceased substitute for the deceased. By consuming the food, they enable it to pass into the other world, where it nourishes the dead.”⁷³

Bread and wine shared with the deceased at funerary banquets thus connect the living with the dead. How far this was or is experienced as “real” or “symbolic” depends as much on the perception of the individual participants as on whether the presence of the ‘raised one’ is mediated by speech, by the shared food itself or by remembering the intimacy of shared meals in the past. Either way, the meal in Jesus’ presence brings him back to life.

Conclusion

I hope to have demonstrated how someone at community meals might have acted out the part of Jesus and how he or, more likely, she might have designated bread and wine as symbols of the deceased and of the risen Jesus. The so-called “Words of Institution,” conveyed to the Corinthians by Paul, relate to the night on which the events leading to Jesus’ passion and death began. The “Words of Institution” themselves contain a fragment of that story. With their dense alternation of action and speech, they mark the climax of an important scene. Moreover the “Words of Institution” coincide with a feasting practice. A community celebrating its meals with these words reenacts a decisive moment of the said night. Admittedly, it is not clear from the context of 1 Corinthians 11 that those “Words of Institution” were indeed spoken by anyone at community meals.⁷⁴ However, some observations suggest this scenario at least as a working hypothesis. For Paul the meal itself is an act of proclaiming the death of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:26). Moreover, we know of more than five variations on the theme of the “Words of Institution”. The fact that every single author who cited these words up to the third century felt a need to reformulate them in her or his own manner, suggests that they were constantly in use, at least in some communities.⁷⁵ When in the longer version of Luke 22:19–20, the anamnesis order is added, and when Matthew includes an invitation to “eat” (Matthew 26:26) and “drink from the cup” (Matthew

26:27), the appeal to those participating at such meal becomes even more direct.⁷⁶ Therefore, it seems highly likely that these words played some role at Early Christian feasts.⁷⁷

Based on its elements and on the *anamnesis* order, the meal described in this story-fragment reveals itself to be a funerary banquet. Here, family, friends and associates remember the life and deeds of the departed in order to comfort one another and to heal ‘the savage wound gnawing at their breast’. One form of remembrance testified many times in Antiquity, including the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, are dirges and laments. Early oral accounts of Jesus’ sufferings and death might have grown out of such laments. At the very least, multiple features of the ancient funeral ritual as well as motifs from the Psalms of Lament are woven together into the oldest passion narratives we know.

Both modern ethnography and the epitaphs on ancient gravestones suggest that dirges and laments were experienced as a means of communicating with the dead. Food and drink shared at funeral meals mediate symbolically between the realms of the living and the dead. Through their mouths and bodies, the lamenters were able to allow “the Risen One” to speak symbolic words through their voice and to perform symbolic acts through their bodies. In doing so, they would indeed have become ‘actors in a divine drama’.⁷⁸ The words “This is my body” spoken in the name of the dead and risen Jesus, might thus have originated at funerary meals in the context of dramatic retellings of Jesus’ passion.

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¹ This article is based on a paper presented at Ellen Bradshaw Aitken’s (1961–2014) last conference entitled “Coming back to life” at McGill University, Montreal, in May 2014. I dedicate this article to Ellen. To her we owe basic insights into early Christian women’s traditions, performance and memory. Her 2012 article “Remembering and Remembered Women in Greco-Roman Meals” anticipates the line of thinking taken up here and contains important methodological and hermeneutical reflections.

² See for example in New Testament Scholarship: Smith 2003; Klinghardt 1996; Taussig 2009; Smith and Taussig 2012. For research on the history of liturgy, cf.: Messner 2009, 214–216; Bradshaw 2004; Leonhard and Eckhard 2010, 1067–1076.

³ Smith 2003, 279.

⁴ On the differences between the Greek and Roman ideals concerning socially significant meals, cf.: Stavrianopoulou 2009, 159–183; Standhartinger 2012b, 69–73; see also her article *Mahlgemeinschaften. Diskurs und Wirklichkeit einer antiken, frühjüdischen und frühchristlichen Praxis*, in *lectio difficilior 2/2005*.

⁵ Aitken 2012, 111.

⁶ Smith 2003, 189.

⁷ Some scholars still attribute the words to the historical Jesus, as they appear to remain otherwise inexplicable. Cf. recently: Löhr 2012, 82f.

⁸ Jeremias 1990.

⁹ The liturgy is first discussed in the Mishnah, *Pesahim X*. The Pesah-Haggadah, on the other hand, is considerably younger. Cf. Stemberger 1987, 145–158 and Leonhard 2003, 201–231. To what extent Mishnah, *Pesahim X* can be said to describe a common practice from the first century must remain open. Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 2.148 provides an all too general description.

¹⁰ Jeremias 1990, 224.

¹¹ There is also a discussion, of whether there was actually a Passover Seder in the first century, cf. Hauptmann 2001; Leonhard 2006 et. al. Even if one argues, like Marcus 2013, that there was a non-institutionalized family celebration of the Passover already in the first century CE, because the gospels of Mark and Luke presuppose it, the literarily independent scenes of Mark 14:22–25 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–25 imply no Passover atmosphere at all.

¹² The miraculous discovery of the room (Mark 14:12–17) is part of a doublet with the discovery of the mule in Mark 11:1–7. The identification of the betrayer (Mark 14:18–21) is also to be found without the Words of Institution (cf. John 13:21–30). In both verses 18 and 22 the narration begins with the formulation καὶ ἐσθιόντων. Cf. Robbins 1976, 21–40.

¹³ NRSV adapted.

¹⁴ The formulation “I have received from the Lord” (παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου) identifies the Kyrios, i.e. the risen one, as the source, not the tradent, of the tradition; otherwise we would expect the preposition παρά with the genitive. Bornkamm 1959, 147; Koester 1998, 344.

¹⁵ Bradshaw and Johnson 2012, 23, assume that “St. Paul himself did begin to associate the sayings of Jesus with the supper that took place on the night before he died, and interpreted them as referring to the sacrifice of his body and blood and to the new covenant that would be made through his death,” but this thesis proves unconvincing. Even if one argues that the παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου refers to a private revelation to Paul (the usual use of the tradition-formula in Paul does not affect the proposal, cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1–9), the fact that there is no reference in the content of the formula to the divisions and conflict in the community discussed in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 shows that Paul assumes knowledge of the text.

¹⁶ Yet παραδίδομι for Paul does not allude to Judas’ betrayal but rather to the theological continuity of the coming of Christ. Cf., for example, Romans 4:15.

¹⁷ Koester 1993, 199–204; Aitken 1997, 359–370; Idem. 2004, 27–54.

¹⁸ Laum 1914, 141. The testament of Epicurus, according to *Diogenes Laertius* X.18, reads: εἰς τὴν ἡμῶν τε καὶ Μητροδώροθ <μνήμην>. On this subject, see also Cicero, *De finibus* 2.31; cf. also Plutarch, mor. 1129A. Cf. Heitmüller 1911, 71; Dölger 1922, 105–106; Klauck 1982, 82–86.

¹⁹ Cf. also Ezekiel 24:17; Hosea 9:4; Tobit 14:17. Klauck 1982, 88, therefore suggests that the mourning banquet described in Jeremiah is the only parallel for a meal with bread and wine in which bread is broken. Cf. also *ibid.*, 368. Cf. Zittwitz 1892, 1–12; Meding 1975, 544–552.

²⁰ For funerary banquets: Lindsay 1998, 67–80; Dunbabin 2003, 103–140 and 229–236; Tulloch 2006, 164–193 and 289–296; Jensen 2008, 107–143; Graham 2005, 58–64. For Jewish traditions: for funeral banquets in Judea: Block-Smith 1992, 122–132; Wenning and Zenger 1990, 285–303; McCane 2003, 1–59; Green 2008, 145–173.

²¹ Diel, ILCV 1. 1570 = CIL 8.20.277. Translation by Jensen 2008, 126. C.f. Quasten 1940, 253–266.

²² Cf. Stears 2008, 149.

²³ Cf. Standhartinger 2010.

²⁴ Aitken 2012 points to this story as narrative about a practice of lamentation that becomes the occasion for the presentation of a performance. Here “lamentation functioned as a matrix of community memory for the development of the Jesus tradition.” (115)

²⁵ Osiek 2001.

²⁶ For features of mortuary rituals in Mark 14:3–9 par. cf. Sawicki 2001. The identity of Josef of Arimathaea is disputed among the Gospels. He might be a member of the (city-) council or the Synhedrion (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50), Jesus’ disciple (Matthew 27:57) or a friend of Pilatus (*Gospel of Peter* 2.3).

²⁷ Schroer 2002; Šterbenc-Erker 2011

²⁸ Sawicki 1994, 149–183; cf. 2001.

²⁹ Concerning food for the dead cf. Volp, 2002, 61f. and for later Christian practice *ibid.* 214–224.

³⁰ Aitken 2012, 121.

³¹ On historical-critical problems of Jesus’ burial in the Gospels see *inter alia* Myllykoski 2001; Cook 2011.

³² D’Angelo 2000, 118.

³³ 1 Corinthians 15:4; Mark 8:31par.; 9:31par.; 10:34par.

³⁴ Corley 1998, 216–218.

³⁵ *Gospel of Peter* 14; John 21:1–14.

³⁶ Cf. Mark 15:24/John 19:24; Mark 15:27–32a; Mark 15:36/John 29:29; John 19:36–37 etc.

³⁷ Ebner 2001; Janowski 2003; Ahearne-Kroll 2007.

³⁸ But see Schuele 2010.

³⁹ Corley 1998, 215f. *Idem.* 2010, 111–133.

⁴⁰ Crossan 1998, 527–73. For a critique of Crossan’s approach see Schaberg 2002, 238–253.

⁴¹ Crossan 1998, 573.

⁴² Paul became aware of the Risen Jesus through a vision, see 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8 (Gal 1:15–17?), by an internal light (2 Corinthians 4:6) and by reasoning Phil 3:6–10.

⁴³ Aitken 2012, cf. 1997; 2004, 27–54.

⁴⁴ Artemidor, *Onir.* 5.82.

⁴⁵ Petronius, *Satyricon* 65.

⁴⁶ *Luct.* 9; cf. also *Char.* 22–23.

⁴⁷ There is some evidence that Christians of the second century onward and later dined in the presence of Christian martyrs and apostles. Cf. *Acts of John* 72; *Mart. Pol.* 18:2–3; There are graffiti within the catacomb of St. Sebastian which invoke the martyr-apostles Peter and Paul to the *refrigica* (funerary banquets). Cf. Jensen 2008, 124 and Snyder 1985, 141–145. Still in the fourth century there is ample evidence of women feeding the dead in the polemics of some

church fathers like Augustin, *Confessiones* 6.2; Augustin, *epistulae*, 22-1.6, *Mor. eccl.* 34 (75); John Chrysostomos, *Hom. Jo.* 11:1–2 (62,4); *Hom. Matt.* 9:18, (31,4).

⁴⁸ Both sexes expressed their mourning, but “women lamented his [or her] loss for the family and described the death as tragic through the conventional formulae of oral poetry”.

(Šterbenc-Erker 2011, 51). Cf. also Corley 2010; Hope 2011; Graham 2011. In Rome, status and class also entailed differences in mourning rites, cf. Richlin 2001, 229–248. Mustakallio 2005, 179–190.

⁴⁹ Jahnow 1923, 2–57; Alexiou 2002; Holst-Warhaft 1992.

⁵⁰ Cf. Medick 1989, 48–84.

⁵¹ Humphreys 1978, 13. Cf. Martin 2008, 45–52 and 221–217.

⁵² On interpreting ancient artifacts and texts on death rituals through the lens of modern Greek ethnography, see also Psychogiou 2009; Håland 2014.

⁵³ Alexiou 2002, 131–150; Seremetakis 1990; 2009.

⁵⁴ Perkell 2008, 104.

⁵⁵ Caraveli-Chaves 1980, 129–57.

⁵⁶ Caraveli-Chaves 1980, 134, from the Lament of Chrysa Kalliakati:

⁵⁷ Caraveli-Chaves, Bridge, 141.

⁵⁸ Danforth 1982, 80f. Cf. Klaar 1932, 46f. The lamenters do not therefore make up the text as they sing, but rather make use of a repertoire of various laments. For further laments, in which the deceased addresses the living in the first person, cf. Lardas 1992, 243f. (nr. 778–781); 250 (nr. 792f.) and so on. Cf. also Joannidu 1938, 37–44.

⁵⁹ But see the Epigram of the Hellenistic poet Anyte (C3rd BCE): “Often Kleino, the mother, full of sorrow, cried out at the grave of her daughter, calling for her dear child, gone from her so early, called back Philaiaina’s soul, which before her marriage had passed over the water of swift-flowing Acheron.” (*Anthologia Graeca* 7:486). For Anyte’s poetry see Greene 2005, 139–157.

⁶⁰ CEG 80 = Friedländer 1948, 81f (Nr. 76). In Peek 1960 there are for example in the 105 epigrams dated before 320 BCE, twenty-one in which the deceased speaks in the first person, twenty-two in which the deceased is addressed, and eight in which the reader is addressed in the second person. Cf. Vestrheim 2010, 61–78, esp. 63.

⁶¹ CEG 159 = Friedländer 1948, 88; Nr. 84. In some inscriptions the deceased provide words of comfort for the bereaved, e.g. Reinhold Merkelbach and Josef Stauber (eds.), *Steinepigramme aus dem Griechischen Osten* (SGO), Munich and Leipzig 1998–2002, 04/08/02 = Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften* [GVI], Berlin 1955, 969 Daldis on the west coast of Asia Minor (C1st CE); 05/01/31 Smyrna (C2nd BCE) = Peek 804 (C2nd BCE); 05/01/32 = Peek, GVI 1879 Smyrna (C2nd CE). Sometimes words of mourning are attributed to the reader, cf. for example CEG 470: “I grieve whenever I look on the tomb of young Autoclide and his death ...”

⁶² Cf. the collection of Peek, GVI, 550–572, which however does not differentiate between the literary and inscriptional.

⁶³ Koch 1998, 24. Cf. also the grave monument of Flavius Agricola mentioned by Dunbabin, 2003, 104f. For more inscriptions on tombstones with banquet scenes and an inscription that lets the deceased speak to the living, see: Reinhold Merkelbach and Josef Stauber (eds.), *Steinepigramme aus dem Griechischen Osten* (SGO) 03/03/01 Metropolis in Ionia (C1st BCE) = Peek, GVI 1119; 08/05/03 Miletupolis (or Kyzikos) in Mysia (C3rd CE); 08/05/09 *ibid.* Imperial Era; 09/04/05 Prusa ad Olympum in Bithynia (late hellenistic); 10/03/03 Amastis in Paphlagonia (undated); Cf. also illusions to a funerary banquet in the text: 06/029/01 Pergamon (undated); 06/03/01 Stratonikeia on the Kaikos (undated). Inscriptions in which the lionized deceased encourage sacrifice, cf. Peek 1960, Nr. 168; 464; 474.

⁶⁴ Friedländer 1948, 66; Cf. Raubitschek 1969, 26: “Homerische Überlieferung, mündliche Tradition, zeitgenössische Poesie, Grab- und Weihekult, all diese Elemente haben zur Formung des Epigramms beigetragen, sie waren sozusagen das Rohmaterial aus dem das Denkmal-Epigramm geschaffen wurde.” On the blurring of the boundaries between the living and the dead on grave-epitaphs and their representations in poetry see Erasmo 2008, 155–204.

⁶⁵ Day 1989, 27. Cf. *ibid.* 2007, 29–47.

⁶⁶ Derderian 2001, 191.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁶⁸ Fually 2010, 151–166, esp. 153.

⁶⁹ Alexiou 2002, 106: “These inscriptions are an invaluable source of evidence for the present study, since they are probably the closest reflection of popular language, style and thought in antiquity that we possess, although we cannot be sure of the exact manner of their composition.”

⁷⁰ Smith 2003, 189.

⁷¹ Self-identification with bread and wine does however occasionally appear in early martyr traditions. Thus, Ignatius of Antioch on the way to his death utters: “I am God’s wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread [of Christ]” (Ign., Rom 4.1), Transl. Lightfoot. So too Polycarp on the stake desires, “that God might find him worthy ... to have a share in the number of the martyrs to the cup of your Christ”, and wishes to be received as a “sacrifice which pleases” (14,2). At the same time, one’s own martyrdom is to be seen as an imitation of the Passion of Jesus (Cf. Moss 2010). I therefore think it is at least likely that, in the experiences of those who composed the Letters of Ignatius and the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the “Words of Institution” may have played a role (Cf. also Horsting 2011, 307–325).

⁷² Cf. among many others Schröter 2006, 128. Löhr 2012, 57, would like to have τοῦτο apply to τὸ σῶμα, and thus interprets the neuter as an *attractio*. But οὗτος generally applies to what has come before, not what follows.

⁷³ Danforth 1982, 105.

⁷⁴ Therefore some scholars deny that they played any role at all. Cf. McGowan 1999. However, a catechetical or other function cannot be proven either.

⁷⁵ Mark 14:22–24; Matthew 26:26–28; Luke 22:17–19; 22:17–20; 1 Corinthians 10:16f.; Justin 1. Apology 66:3; *Gos. Heb.* fragment 7 (Heronymus, *De viri inlustres*.2) et. al.

⁷⁶ Matthew also links the meal to the community rules for forgiving sins (compare Matthew 26:28 with 18:15–21)

⁷⁷ A dramatic performance and re-enactment of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea forms the night vigil after the festive symposium of the therapeutae and therapeutrides described by Philo in *Contemplative Life* 83–89. Cf. Aitken, 2012, 115. The Iobacchoi in Athens, an association known from an inscription (SIG^{3/} III 1109, 124–127 (178 CE)), performed a play, in which the characters included Dionysus, Kore, Persephone, Aphrodite and other gods at table. On the latter cf. Ebel 2008.

⁷⁸ Cf. Smith 2003, 189. For a similar assumption compare Aitken 2012, 114f.; Corley 2010, 106–109.

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