

THE SYMPOSIUM, WINE AND THE ETHICS OF THE *POLIS*

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... and mingled together the blood of the Bacchic god
with fresh-flowing tears of the Nymphs.
Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 11. 465c

Poetic and sparky descriptions of the symposium and of drinking wine are an essential part of Greek and Roman literature. One of the most obvious ways to explain this is to connect the subject with the ancients' pursuit of personal pleasure. And indeed, this aspect is dominating in lyric poetry and in a number of drinking songs. But the very meaning of symposium, i.e. 'drinking together', causes one to look beyond the pleasure principle and to ask how the drinking party contributes to the principles of living together in the Greek *polis*. My aim in this essay is to observe the Greek symposium from the psycho-ethical aspect: to analyze the symposium as the event where personal feelings function in social context. The psychological side was understood by the ancients as the functioning of the individual soul, while the ethical side included the relations to the society at large. How these two aspects function as a whole and create the specific atmosphere of the symposium – this question will be observed against the background of the Greek *polis*. In other words, the following discussion will focus on the problem of whether there exists a connection between different attitudes towards the symposium and the forms of the *politeia*.

The Private and the Public in the Symposium

In general, before the rise of Athenian democracy, the symposium and wine were mainly related to the personal sphere, focused on pleasure and emotions. The influence of wine on one's soul was of major interest, and only few connections were made with the wider social context of the state. Later, in classical times, the psychological element remained but there appeared especially in Athens a new emphasis on the social aspect of the symposium.

In classical scholarship, the various sides of the symposium have been observed separately for a long time. Due to the mainly generic approach to ancient literature, various aspects of the drinking party concerning its personal and social importance were discussed mostly in the specific context of the authors. The main question was how the descriptions of the banquet in the texts reflect the real event, i.e. how trustworthy the literary tradition would be. The social meaning of the symposium, its "philosophy", was mentioned only occasionally. But from the 1980s onwards, a complex view of the symposium and especially of its social meaning received more attention. (Cf. the works of Oswyn Murray, W. J. Slater, and others) This development reflects the coming-together of several trends towards a wide-ranging and essentially functionalist interpretation of Greek culture. (Murray 1994:8) With that, the anthropological approach became accepted in classical literary criticism, and the integrated idea of the symposium began to take shape from this time. Nevertheless, there has been no discussion yet as to what it was in the symposium that made it a typical phenomenon of Athenian political culture.

The parallels between the political life of a city and a private drinking party are supported by the anthropological approach to drinking in general. The assumption is that a drinking party is a social event which is performed according to certain rules in a recognized context: it reflects the actual structure of social life and constructs at the same time an ideal world. (Douglas 1988:4–8) Looking from this perspective at the representation of the symposium in ancient literature, it becomes evident that the importance of sympotic motives in the texts goes beyond the purely literary and aesthetic sphere. In the symposium, private pleasure becomes a matter of common importance.

In the Greek texts concerning the symposium as a social institution, some striking parallels with the functioning of the *polis* strike the eye. What one does in the *polis* occurs also in the symposium: both include ethical principles which must lead to creating friendly relationships between the participants. Moderation and order, cunning intelligence and longing for peace and stability are the traits which make the symposium the microcosm of the *polis*. (Levine 1985:176–78) The requirements for a member of a *polis* and of a drinking party resemble each other: temperance, harmony and order have to prevail over the outburst of emotions, one has to obey the rules established for the event. In Greek, these principles were expressed by the concepts of σωφροσύνη, εὐφροσύνη, ἡσυχίη, εὐνομία, χάρις (temperance, mirth, peace of mind, order, kindness). These principles of private and civic virtue were valued not only for the pleasure of the individual but more because of their importance to the common body of the participants. Thus, it is the jointly-felt atmosphere of the symposium which supports the assumption that the drinking party as a social institution and the *polis* could be discussed in similar terms.

In Greek society, there were certain places and events where harmonious relations between attendants became especially indicative of society. In these

places, civic behavior of a certain kind was expected and misconduct criticized. For Greece, such places of public meetings were the theatre, market, court of law, baths, and gymnasium. To be accepted as a member of the society, one had to meet the expectations of one's fellow members in these gatherings. As compared to these, the symposium had a more private character and contained a greater hedonistic aspect than the others. But nevertheless, the forms of eating and drinking reflected and reinforced the social system in complex ways and they also created and maintained a variety of cultural values.

Plato held the first longer discussion of the moral effect of the symposium and wine, connecting them to the wider social context. He argued that the influence of wine is worthy of a thorough philosophical discussion because of its connection with the human character. In the *Nomoi* ("Laws"), he describes how wine is related to human nature and its habitual character (ἥθος): how in the symposium the hidden side of the soul and the state of mind are revealed (*Nomoi* 1.649-50b). It took two books of the *Nomoi* to demonstrate the significant role of drinking parties in the polis.

In the first book, Plato raises the question about the importance of the drinking party in the state and declares that it is a matter of great significance. He makes an Athenian defend this opinion while the representative of Sparta holds the opposite view: in their state, drinking was despised and considered harmful. (1.637a) The discussion about wine and drunkenness is based on the assumption that in different states, laws and attitudes, i.e. the *nomoi*, are different. It means that both written and unwritten regulations in a given society form values of their own which do not necessarily resemble those of the other states. The symposium is one of the social institutions (1.639d) which reflect the attitudes of the society. In Sparta and in Athens, the political systems were different (resp. oligarchic and democratic). Thus, we may ask why in classical Athens the symposium was first openly recognized as having political importance.

Before and After Plato

Symposia had been held since archaic times. This kind of banquet was part of the Greek civilization already in Homer's time. (Burkert 1991:7) Greek epical and lyrical texts describe the relation of the symposium and wine to the soul and the external signs of this influence. Lyrical poems were dealing more with the personal side of the symposium, first of all with emotions. The influence of wine on man's soul was the major theme. In archaic lyrics, Alcaeus describes wine as being a "peephole" into man. (Fr. 333) Also, the curative effect of wine was acknowledged already in the earliest texts: wine and the atmosphere of the symposium were considered by poets to be a remedy against grieving and feeling depressed:

οὐ χρῆ κάκοισι θυμὸν ἐπιτρέπην,
 φαρμάκων δ' ἄριστον
 οἶνον ἐνεικαμένοις μεθύσθην. (Alcaeus fr. 335)¹

As for the influence of wine, it can reach both feet and reason. (Theognis 506-507, further Theog.) In Theognis, the symposium took the form of an aristocratic drinking party. (Cairns 1993:168) It was a place of learning noble values and aristocratic virtue. The texts describe the relation of wine and emotions, and how wine influences the character of interpersonal relationships. In Theognis, there is a code of behavior and conventions which are part of the symposium. There were principles of conduct which revealed themselves in the symposium better than anywhere else. From the elements of the symposium – music, song, conversation –, especially the latter was important in creating the proper atmosphere of mirth and a civilized behavior (εὐφροσύνη). Inner reality and intention (πεῖρα) and outer appearance (δόξα) were distinguished in the symposium like by a touchstone. (βάσανος, Theog. 417–418) In Theognis, appearance is often described as preventing real knowledge. The banquet with drinking wine becomes a place where men's intentions, their mind and thoughts are revealed. (Donlan 1985:237) This was the idea later developed by Plato.

In classical times, in the 5th century, wine was still considered as a mirror of reason. (Euripides Fr. 393) Wine brings forth the inner nature of man. It strengthens the body, it confirms and reveals emotions. Drinking wine makes men light-hearted and cheerful. By the words of the tragic poet Ion of Chios (who lived during the time of Pericles), friendliness (φιλοφροσύνη, Ath. 11.463c) is the feeling which goes with drinking wine.

It was the sympotic context in which new ideas in ideology and innovations in values were described by the poets. In this respect, the sympotic poem of Xenophanes is a good example. (Fr. B 1) Written in elegiac couplets, this is one of the most elegant poems on the symposium, describing the setting and the mood which a well-conducted banquet has to follow. In this poem, Xenophanes combines the religious and the social aspects of the symposium. Peace, justice and the co-operative values are the necessary concomitants of this event. Using the word καθαρός (pure, In.s 1, 8, 14) he is referring both to ritual purity and moral goodness. (Adkins 1985:186) This symposium poem contains new ideas which together with the other extant poems of Xenophanes bring forth a new philosophy of the *polis*. The poet introduces a concept of human ἀρετή, an excellence which consists of philosophically and morally responsible wisdom in the world of human values. (Kattel 1997:140) Here we can see how a sympotic poem serves as a mirror which reflects the new configuration of social ideas.

Later, post-classical sources were taking up the traditional elements of the symposium and discussed both the personal and social aspects of the banquet.

¹ "We should not surrender our hearts to the troubles /.../ the best of remedies is to bring wine and get drunk."

One of the later Greek authors who gave a very comprehensive and all-encompassing overview of the principles and philosophy of the symposium was Plutarch (A.D. 43–120) in his moral treatises. The relevant part, named *Quaestiones convivales* (*Table-talk*, Συμποσιακῶν βίβλια, further Plut. Mor.) describes the questions connected with banqueting and drinking wine from various aspects: moral as well as social and psychological. In Plutarch, we find the traditional views about symposium of the earlier authors. The many-sided knowledge about banqueting is gathered also in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* (*Learned men at the banquet*, further Ath.) from about the same period as Plutarch. The attention paid to the symposium by various authors demonstrates the permanent interest of the ancients in this subject.

Greek Symposium in Action

Concerning the participants, the organization of the Greek symposium reflected the principles of the Greek states: both combined in their organization elements of the exclusiveness (concerning members) and openness (concerning occasional guests). In the symposium, the members were all male and inside the group, an egalitarian code of behavior was the rule. Like in symposium, a selected group of citizens (adult, male and Greek) functioned in the framework of equal rights also in the polis. The invited persons whose role was to serve and amuse the fellow-drinkers, the *sympotai*, had an auxiliary function similarly to the roles of women and slaves in Athenian society. There had to be a place for uninvited guests in the symposium, as there was for guests and strangers in the Athenian polis. This reflects the demand of hospitality in ancient society: an unwritten law to meet strangers and to provide them with food and lodging. (Plut. Mor. 5. 5. 678e)

In all periods, there was a common aspect of the symposium: this was the occasion when personal pleasure and social meaning were interrelated. Therefore, the symposium can be observed from private, political and cultural dimensions. But it was in the democratic polis in the classical times of the 5–4th centuries when, in the philosophical approaches to the drinking party, the political aspect emerged: in Athens, the symposium changed from an aristocratic club meeting of the archaic period to a model of the democratic polis. The basis of this change were the principles of education. Plato in his political philosophy made the symposium part of education which was appropriate in preparing the citizens for social life. Thus, the symposium was accordingly the place for civic education which suited the aim of the ideal polis. In this, the difference from Sparta becomes apparent: there, young men received their education in military camps. There were special characteristics in the symposium which made it possible to give to a drinking party in Athens such an eminent role.

The symposium consisted of established ritualistic acts which were regulated by a precise set of norms. There the religious and educational sides met with the

ludic and entertaining aspects. The symposium was the party among friends. This kind of gathering often served to celebrate a specific occasion: victory in theatrical or sporting competitions, political or military victory, etc. In such cases it therefore had a social function to highlight, by collective consensus, the exceptional moments in life, both personal and communal. (Pellizer 1994:178)

From ancient times to Plato and onwards, there were laws which the banquet imposed on itself. Both society and the symposium needed to be correctly ruled. First of all, there were rules which regulated drinking and were directed towards moderate drinking of wine. In the ideal symposium, heavy drunkenness and its consequences, but also complete abstinence, were avoided. The principle of moderation (μέτρον), the disciplined use of wine was controlled by the *ad hoc* elected head of the symposium, the symposiarch (συμποσίαρχος). As social institutions benefit from a commander, so also the symposium functions well and gives the feeling of pleasure thanks to the president of the symposium who conducts the drinking party, determining the customs in drinking, order, the strongness and amount of wine. Such a man had to meet certain requirements. He had to be a moderate drinker himself, also an older and a temperate man. He had to behave like the head of a democratic state in fixing the rules of the gathering which would be in accordance with the expectations of its members.

In the *Table-talk*, Plutarch gives an example where the president of the symposium and a leader of the democratic *polis* are compared. Pericles, the leader of democratic Athens, was constantly reminding himself of his obligations in such a way: "Keep in mind, Pericles, you govern free men, you govern Greeks, you govern Athenians." (Plut. Mor. 1.4, 620d) A good symposiarch must act in a similar way. He makes sure that the correct and agreed-upon rules of the banquet are kept, and he must remember that he governs friends (φίλων ἄρχεις, 620d). The ideals of the symposium were cultural ideals, and the well-organized and successful symposium was the vehicle for their expression. (Slater 1991:3)

Communication in the symposium (λόγος συμποτικός) consisted in a learned talk which promoted intellectual aims (e.g., Plato's *Symposium*), together with a poetical performance of solo or choral singing. The content of the latter included heroic and love songs. A collection of drinking songs (σκόλια) which were performed at banquets has survived. They deal with moral examples, putting forth ethical maxims (e.g. Ath. 15. 694c-696d with the focus on the themes of moral excellence, ethical examples and friendship). In content, they give and establish positive or negative models in society: praise of an excellent, virtuous man and condemnation of a vicious one. Promoting ethical principles was combined with the emotional side and entertainment in the *scolia*. Through the consumption of wine, through discussions of the most varied range of subjects (including, obviously, political topics), through jokes and teasing between the participants, and through the development of the discourse on love, the symposium assumed the character of a regulated, controlled, and ritualized exercise of passions. (Pellizer 1994:183)

The Ancient Democracy and Logocracy

The symposium is best known in the Athenian context. It seems that there were certain aspects in the Athenian *politeia* which had their appropriate counterparts in the organization of the symposium. The nucleus and the common key words for both of them were freedom, equal rights for the members, and the dominance of speech. (λόγος) These concepts lead to the central ideas of Athenian democracy, equal rights and freedom of speech (παρρησία, ἰσηγορία, see e.g. Herodotus 5.77-78) of which the Athenians were proud and felt superior towards the other states in Hellas.

Pericles' *Funeral Oration* (in Thucydides 1.22.1) gives a short and concise synopsis of the entire philosophy of the Athenian character and government. It establishes the principles on which the Athenian democracy was built. The main point of the speech was to make a distinction between Athenian democracy and Spartan oligarchy: the latter being the rule of the few, restricting eligibility for office to one section of citizens. Pericles may have exaggerated in opposing the governmental systems of Athens and Sparta and much of his speech is political propaganda, but his main message nevertheless remains valid. It is the openness of the Athenians and the tolerance toward one another which made the main distinction in the social attitudes of these two states. (Harris 1992:162-163)

Thucydides' words attributed to Pericles are supported by other sources of dramatic (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes) and political writings. From the latter, the criticism of the Athenian democracy by the "Old Oligarch" is of special interest. According to it, Athens was a community controlled by the decisions of the people, i.e. the majority. The main criticism made by the "Old Oligarch" of Athens is their equal right to express their opinion publicly, that is – the very basis of democracy. This made the oligarchic author say that bad government or lawlessness (κακονομία) is connected with the peoples' strength and freedom. (Pseudo-Xenophon 1. 8)

Aristotle's discussion of democracy proceeds from the concept of equality (ἴσον, Aristotle *Politics* 1291b31-32, further Arist. Pol.) This means the active right to participate in decision-making and equality before the law. Democracy is connected to freedom (ἐλευθερία, 1291b34): this is the main factor distinguishing it from aristocracy and oligarchy which were based respectively on virtue and on wealth. (Arist. Pol. 1294a10-12) Aristotle describes the character (ἦθος) of the various forms of democracy and analyzes their positive and negative aspects. He makes an important distinction between the formal and the actual functioning of the political system, opposing *politeia* (organization according to the laws) and the ἦθος (real administration) of the polis. (1294a13-14) Where no laws are respected, there is also no *politeia*. (1292a33-34) Oligarchy is different because it excludes from the governmental institutions certain groups on grounds of property, personal, hereditary or family reasons. (1292b1-5) According to Aristotle, it is possible to speak about the good life

according to the principle of ἀρετή (i.e. excellence) which is μεσότης, the medium way, and the same criteria of goodness and badness can be used in both cases. (1295a 37-40) And what is moderate and medium, is the best, both in life and in the *politeia*. (1295b2) Either extremes lead to a state which is not of free men but of slaves and masters. (1295b21-22) It is the medium which follows reason (1295b6); it can be defined as a community which is based on friendship. (κοινωνία φιλικόν, 1295b24) This discussion of the medium in the *politeia* leads to the statement that democracy is safer and will last longer than oligarchy thanks to the more numerous and more important middle class. (1296a13-15) Being far from unconditional praise for democracy, Aristotle realized that even to the middle class democracy is not attractive in every instance. It was cooperation that every *politeia* had to observe, and the basis of the good *politeia* had to be freedom, wealth, education and good birth. (1296b18)

These treatments of democracy, especially the freedom of speech aspect reveals parallels with the symposium. In contrasting Athens to other Greek states, the recurring point seems to be the talkativeness of Athenians: in their state there was an opportunity to freely express one's opinions. It is indicative that the Athenian whom Plato has defending the role of the drinking party in the *Nomoi* starts with a preliminary remark about the fondness of Athenians for talking. As compared to Sparta and other Greek states, Athens was fond of talk and full of talk. (φιλόλογος, πολύλογος, *Nomoi* 1. 641e) The constitution and customs of Athens supported the 'philological' side of their *polis*, making the citizens participate in legal and political debates and in common festivities with their theatrical performances. This does not mean that in the banquets of the other *poleis* there was no talk. Talking is, of course, a common pleasure for human beings. What makes the difference is the general attitude towards free talk and its relative role in classical Athens as compared to the other states.

A key aspect in the democratic *polis* was the freedom to participate, to speak and to listen to the others. (Arist. Pol. 1291b30-38, 1317a40-1318a3) Looking at the same principle in the symposium, we can see that it had to be organized in such a way that all could speak and have an opportunity to listen to all other members of the banquet. From this, the concept of sympotic unity arises (Plut. Mor. 1.1.615a) – a special feeling which is created during the conversation. The subject of conversation had to emotionally and intellectually connect all the members of the drinking party. The subject could vary from historical to contemporary events, being often connected with ethical questions – piety, courage, magnanimity, kindness and benevolence. (εὐσέβειαν, ἀνδρικῶν πράξεων, μεγαλοδύμων, χρηστών, φιλανθρώπων; Plut. Mor. 1.1. 614b)

The religious aspect of conducting a drinking party supported the aspects mentioned above. Openness and freedom were also key words in the cult of Dionysus, the god of wine who was called the Liberator. (Λυαῖος, *Lyaïos*, e.g. Plut. Mor. 7.10.716b-c) Dionysus the Liberator of all things unbridles the tongue, which leads to the idea of wine revealing the truth. This gave rise to the assumption

that wine was a pain-allaying drug. It creates a feeling of togetherness within the group involved in the conversation. Talking and wine made a pair which complemented each other and had the same attributes. According to Plutarch, wine in the symposium must be joint and so must be the conversation in which all take part. (Mor. 1.1.614e, 615f) It would be worse, however, to take away the pleasure of conversation at a table than to run out of wine. To say nothing at all while stuffing oneself with food would be absolutely swinish. (Plut. Mor. 1.716e) Describing an excellent drinking companion, the word *philologos* (i.e. a man with the skill of speech, Plut. Mor. 1.1. 613d) was used, which sounds like an echo from the Platonic discourse about laws and the symposium.

Plutarch draws many close parallels between talkativeness and drinking wine: "Just as wine, discovered for the promotion of pleasure and good fellowship, is sometimes misused to produce discomfort and intoxication /.../ so speech, which is the most pleasant and human of social ties, is made inhuman and unsocial by those who use it badly and wantonly". (Plut. Mor. 504e) According to the old proverb cited by Plutarch, what lies in a man's heart when he is sober is in his tongue when he is drunk. (Mor. 503f)

Philia

In organizing and harmonizing life in Greek society both in the symposium and in the *polis*, the idea of friendly co-operation was explicit.

The concept of *philia* (φιλία) signifies various types of interpersonal bonds from political loyalty to erotic affection. In the ancient texts, we can see how similar love-friendship functions as an institutional phenomenon, the bonds of this kind referring to the relations between members of certain group. In this, the inside world of the symposium appears similar to the outside world of the *polis*. (Donlan 1985:236–237) In sympotic poetry, we can see how friendship is a central theme in Greek and also in Roman banquet: it is a world of social relations which focus on the qualities of true friends. (Nappa 1998:393) The ethical value of eating and drinking together was explicit already in Homer, though he does not describe the symposium in classical sense. (Slater 1994:213) However, we see already in the ancient epics how common convivial feasts confirm the ties of friendship between men.

Philia exists between the members of various groups: family, companions in political, professional and military sphere, and others. These groups are held together by common interests and goals. *Philia* is the ethical cornerstone which determines the way how the relations between the members of society function on informal level. In this case, not the written law and official order but rather the conventions and customs are important.

In philosophical texts, *philia* is under discussion mostly in connection with the relations in a good *polis*. Aristotle mentions it as a virtue in the *Nicomachean*

Ethics. (8.1.1155a2) It is an obligatory part of happiness in Aristotle's sense. During the time of the flourishing of the Athenian democracy, the ties of *philia* were honoured. Friendship in this sense is not typical of the royal virtues. Also, a ruler's capacity for *philia* or *amicitia* is almost absent from the later legacy, except in the imitations of classical authors. (Konstan 1997:128) The rise of democratic activity in the state made it possible to consider *philia* as part of the political system, *politeia*.

There must be the unity of feelings and sentiments among the members of the sympotic group (συμπόται), their spirits must be stirred harmoniously and to everybody's profit. (Plut. Mor. 1.1.614e) Wine helps to confirm the atmosphere of mutual connection while making one's attitude mild, compassionate and gentle – it makes one more friendly and lovable. (προσφιλέστερος, Plut. 1.4.620 d-e)

The guests in the banquet form a joint group where all hard feelings disappear. (κακόηθες, Plut. Mor. 7.10.715f) The organization of the party and even the room in which it is held must contribute to it. Too large a room and too big a party would be unsociable and unfriendly. (Plut. Mor. 5. 5. 679b) This makes general conversation difficult, and talk between two or three was considered improper in the symposium. All arrangements had to accomplish the aim of the symposium – to create *philia* through pleasure.

The *sympotai* were described in terms of *us*. Athenaeus, when describing various forms of drinking cups, quotes how different poets asked for the wine to be poured. Wine was meant not for every single person separately, not only for *me* or for *you*, but for all members, for *us*. (πίνωμεν, Ath. 11. 463c) In the symposium, *we* become fellow drinkers (Ath. 10.426f), *we* drink, *we* are thirsty and *we* pray. (10.426f, see also 11. 496b-c; 11. 497c) This feeling of mutual relatedness was equally important also in the wider context, in the *polis*, and it played an educational role in society. (Jaeger 1947:300)

The Influence of Wine

Wine was considered to help in testing political, moral, public and private values. (Bowie 1997:2) The role of wine as a mirror of the soul and a test of one's character has been discussed by Greek poets and philosophers from two aspects. First, it has a beneficial effect: wine relieves tension, brings joy and happiness into one's soul. From the other side, the influence can be disastrous when one drinks in excess and too strong wine (as it happens to Cyclops in *Odyssey* 9). A sharp distinction was always made between drinking and being drunk. These were two completely different things. (Plut. Mor. 7.10.715d)

Plato looked at the trio – moral character, emotions and wine – from the aspect of practical philosophy which was concerned with the ways how society can function. According to Plato, wine may be considered as a touchstone

(βάσσανος) for learning the traits of man's character. Wine reveals both the positive and the negative side of the soul. Plato's discussion of the soul can be transferred into modern terms, and can be related to the inner self: the concept of the soul includes sensations, emotions, skills, will and intelligence. Wine affects one's mind in many respects: sensations, memory, opinions, rational thinking. (αἰσθησις, μνήμη, δόξα, φρόνησις, *Nomoi* 645e) Plato was aware that drinking wine weakens the normal processes and man becomes like a child – spontaneous and simple-minded. Also, one's ignorance (ἀμαθία) is revealed easily through discussions while drinking wine. A negative influence on the moral side of man is revealed when wine causes insolence (ὕβρις) and makes one arrogant towards the others. (*Nomoi* 649d5-6)

Connecting emotions and wine, Plato makes it clear that the latter carries an important role in social relationships. Fellow drinkers become friends and wine confirms mutual relationships. (*Nomoi* 671e) According to Plato, wine makes one feel younger, milder, smooth, loquacious, merry, joyful, self-confident, more acceptable to others, optimistic. (*Nomoi* 666c, 672c) During drinking, the emotions including pleasure, pain, passion and lust are intensified and revealed. (ἡδονὰς, λύπας, θυμοῦς, ἔρωτας, 645d) The beneficial influence of wine is understood as a remedy against fear, which helps to give confidence. (647a, 649a)

Wine makes one act and talk in a way that is very different from one's usual conduct. As a result, it can be considered as a cheap, easy and harmless character test which reveals those personal traits that are usually hidden. This test relieves us from finding out the vices of a person in a hard way in practice and to avoid serious consequences. All this makes the convivial gathering also an important element in education. (*Nomoi* 641d)

Further, a close connection and even equation is seen between the way how a person and a state are observed in Greek philosophy. Personal characteristics and the state system were treated in the same terms: in Plato, five types of society were juxtaposed with the five types of individual character. (ψυχῆς, Plato *Politeia* 8. 545c2-3, though there are also mentioned four types of society, 544d3; a4-5, b1) An oligarchic person and oligarchic state, a democratic and tyrannical person and a democratic and tyrannical state are analyzed in parallel terms. Recalling the connection made by Aristotle between ethical and political theory, we can see that the system of the polis had to resolve in its organization a similar problem as the symposium: to find a reasonable balance between liberty and order. In fact, this is the key question through the ages for every society. Liberty can be preserved only to a certain limit; otherwise, in excess, it becomes anarchy. From the other side, the lack of liberty leads to monarchy, oligarchy or tyranny. The Greek symposium helps to understand the need of finding a medium way between these extremes.

Bringing together the various characteristics of the symposium, emotional, intellectual and social aspects could be pointed out which made the symposium

an important institution in the Athenian civic life. First of all, it was the educational potential of the banquet to promote the values which were considered to be the most important: the convivial gathering, when rightly conducted, was an important element in *paideia*. (Plato *Nomoi* 1.641d) In its logocentric character, the symposium developed the skill of talking and listening to the others which contributed to the way the Athenian political and cultural life functioned. Drinking together in the symposium and living together in the *polis* to a great extent required from the citizens similar attitudes towards co-operation. The ethical principles common to the state and to the drinking party refer to the symposium as the preparation of citizens for public life, e.g. finding a proper relation between their own wishes and the rules established by the symposiarch, keeping moderation and controlling their emotions.

In constructing the system of an ideal state, Plato thought in terms of intellectual development, and this was the aspect which made the symposium attractive to him. The principles of the banquet worked against the military mentality which was the main line of education in Sparta. Plato cannot generally be considered a democrat, but the attitudes which contributed to the development of the *Logos* in democratic Athens suited him nevertheless more than the oligarchic Spartan system with its lesser interest in intellectual and cultural activity. In the sphere of private relations, being a member of the drinking party needed some very similar exercises of soul and body as taking part in the social institutions on the level of the state. The president of the symposium, the symposiarch, ruled in the interest of all members of the sympotic group and in this, he resembled the leader of a democratic state. Even if there is no direct correspondence in the ideology of the symposium and the *polis*, many similar traits in the general atmosphere of these institutions make one look at the banquet as the school of ancient democracy.

Conclusion

The forms of eating and drinking reflect and reinforce the social system in many aspects. In Greece, the way the symposium was held expresses on a small scale the way how society functioned. In the drinking party, a group of equals was formed which in the ideal symposium maintained a sense of group loyalty. With its educational aim, the symposium could be seen as a social ritual aimed at supporting the common identity of its members. This was a logocentric feast where words formed the main means of communication. It modulated the emotions between the performer and the audience via poetry and oration.

Gathering at home for the symposium, drinking wine in the company of friends and congenial men could be considered as an occasion where truth was revealed not only of the fellow drinkers but also of the wider relationship in society. Remembering the popular saying about the truth hidden in wine, we

have to conclude that if there is a truth in wine then it would be the truth about man's psyche in connection with the values which hold society together. In the drinking cups of the men in the symposium, the individual and social side of the participants blend, or to speak in poetical language: Nymphs and the Bacchic god, tears and blood are mingled into a harmonious whole.

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