

M. G. VARVOUNIS

## The *Couvade* in ancient Cyprus: A Folk ritual performance

### RESUM

Paèon d'Amatunt, l'antic mitògraf xipriota, ens forneix una interessant informació sobre l'existència del costum entre els homes a l'antiguitat d'estirar-se i reposar abans del part (la *couvade*). Paèon va assenyalar la seva existència en un estudi relatiu a la *couvade*, però sense analitzar-lo en detall. Segons aquest document, estem en un estadi de transició entre els costums del cicle de la vida, per bé que, al nostre entendre, la *couvade* ha de ser interpretada en el marc dels costums del cicle festiu anual. Aquesta forma particular de pràctica de la *couvade* no està al servei de cap naixement en particular ni tampoc té l'objectiu d'oferir cap mena de protecció màgica a la dona prenyada ni al seu nadó. Tenint en compte que aquest ritual particular de la *couvade* era part d'un festival religiós anual, tenia un caràcter clarament liminar, relacionat amb la fertilitat, i constituïa un ritus de transició. En el nostre cas, el ritual de la *couvade* deixa de ser considerat un costum i és estudiat en el marc de la festa.

### ABSTRACT

Paeon of Amathus, the ancient Cypriot mythographer, offers an important piece of information regarding the existence of the custom of male lying-in (the *couvade*) in antiquity. The information is of significance, in that it is not to be found in the scholarly literature on the subject. Paeon noted its existence in a study relating to the *couvade*, without analyzing it in any detail. As this paper indicates we are at the point of transition here from life-cycle customs, however they are to be interpreted, to the customs of the annual festal cycle. This particular form of the practice of the *couvade* is not intended to bring about any particular birth nor to offer any magical protection for the pregnant woman and for her child. Nor is it intended to offer symbolic confirmation of paternity, but to ensure the fertility and fecundity of the community as a whole. Given, of course, that this particular *couvade* ritual was part of an annual religious festival, it is clearly liminal, concerned with fertility and is a rite of transition. In our case, the *couvade* ritual is removed from its setting of custom and is placed in a festal framework.



M. G. VARVOUNIS

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When referring to the myth of Theseus and Ariadne, Paeon of Amathus, the ancient Cypriot mythographer, offers, among other things, an important piece of information regarding the existence of the custom of male lying-in (the *couvade*) in antiquity. The information is of significance, in that it is not to be found in the scholarly literature on the subject. The present writer noted its existence in a study relating to the *couvade*,<sup>1</sup> without analyzing it in any detail. For this reason, we will look at the passage in the light of the very satisfactory amount of folklore bibliography gathered by Loukatos.<sup>2</sup> Let us now turn first, however, to the passage from Paeon, which has been recently published in a critical edition of ancient Cypriot literature.<sup>3</sup>

Fi (AKυΓ<sup>3</sup> 30 Fi)  
Plut. *Thes.* 20.3-4

1. M. G. VARVOUNIS, *Μυθολογικά και Λαογραφικά Μελετήματα*, Athens 1990, (hereafter: ΜΛΜ), p. 18-19.

2. D. S. ΛΟΥΚΑΤΟΣ, «Ο σύζυγος εις τα κατά την γέννησιν έθιμα και λαογραφικαί ενδείξεις περι αρρενολοχείας», *Επετηρίς Λαογραφικού Αρχείου* 8 (1953-1954), p. 124-168.

3. See A. VOSKOS, *Αρχαία Κυπριακή Γραμματεία 3. Πεζογραφία*, with the assistance of A. Theodoropoulou, Lefkosia 2002 [Anastasios G. Leventis Foundation] (hereafter: AKυΓ<sup>3</sup>), p. 80 and the text at p. 276. Cp. *Ανθολόγιο Αρχαίας Κυπριακής Γραμματείας*, Lefkosia, 2011, p. 112 no. 8. See also A. VOSKOS, *Αρχαία Κυπριακή Γραμματεία 4. Ιατρική*, 2007 [Anastasios G. Leventis Foundation] (hereafter: AKυΓ<sup>4</sup>), p. 260.

Ἄ δ' ἐστὶν εὐφημότατα <τῶν> μυθολογουμένων, πάντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν διὰ στόματος ἔχουσιν. ἴδιον δέ τινα περὶ τούτων λόγον ἐκδέδωκε *Παίων ὁ Ἀμαθούσιος*. τὸν γὰρ Θησέα φησὶν ὑπὸ χειμῶνος εἰς Κύπρον ἐξενεχθέντα καὶ τὴν Ἀριάδνην ἔγκυον ἔχοντα, φαύλως δὲ διακειμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ σάλου καὶ δυσφοροῦσαν, ἐκβιβάσαι μόνην, αὐτὸν δὲ τῷ πλοίῳ βοηθοῦντα πάλιν εἰς τὸ πέλαγος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς φέρεσθαι. τὰς οὖν ἐγχωρίους γυναῖκας τὴν Ἀριάδνην ἀναλαβεῖν καὶ περιέπειν ἀθυμοῦσαν ἐπὶ τῇ μονώσει, καὶ γράμματα πλαστὰ προσφέρειν ὡς τοῦ Θησέως γράφοντος αὐτῇ, καὶ περὶ τὴν ὠδὴν συμπονεῖν καὶ βοηθεῖν, ἀποθανοῦσαν δὲ θάψαι μὴ τεκοῦσαν. ἐπελθόντα δὲ τὸν Θησέα καὶ περιλύπον γενόμενον, τοῖς μὲν ἐγχωρίοις ἀπολιπεῖν χρήματα, συντάξαντα θύειν τῇ Ἀριάδνῃ, δύο δὲ μικροὺς ἀνδριαντίσκους ἰδρύσασθαι, τὸν μὲν ἀργυροῦν, τὸν δὲ χαλκοῦν. ἐν δὲ τῇ θυσίᾳ τοῦ Γορπιαίου μηνὸς ἰσταμένου δευτέρᾳ κατακλινόμενόν τινα τῶν νεανίσκων φθέγγεσθαι καὶ ποιεῖν ἅπερ ὠδίνουσαι γυναῖκες· καλεῖν δὲ τὸ ἄλλος Ἀμαθουσίους, ἐν ᾧ τὸν τάφον δεικνύουσιν, Ἀριάδνης Ἀφροδίτης.

[3] He says that Theseus, driven out of his course by a storm to Cyprus, and having with him Ariadne, who was big with child and in sore sickness and distress from the tossing of the sea, set her on shore alone, but that he himself, while trying to succour the ship, was borne out to sea again. The women of the island, accordingly, took Ariadne into their care, and tried to comfort her in the discouragement caused by her loneliness, brought her forged letters purporting to have been written to her by Theseus, ministered to her aid during the pangs of travail, and gave her burial when she died before her child was born. [4] Paeon says further that Theseus came back, and was greatly afflicted, and left a sum of money with the people of the island, enjoining them to sacrifice to Ariadne, and caused two little statuettes to be set up in her honor, one of silver, and one of bronze. He says also that at the sacrifice in her honor on the second day of the month Gorpiaeus, one of their young men lies down and imitates the cries and gestures of women in travail; and that they call the grove in which they show her tomb, the grove of Ariadne Aphrodite.

(English translation: B. Perrin, *Plutarch's Lives with an English Translation*, Vol. 1 *Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa, Solon and Publicola* (Cambridge, MA., London 1914) 43)

Vid. Plut. Thes., edd. (inter al.) Perrin, Flacelière al., Ziegler al. (1957 / 1969<sup>4</sup>, cum siglis). FHG IV. 371 fr. 2; FGrH 757 F 2; ΑΚΕΠ Γα' 76 (Α' 12, Β' 29).]Ι τῶν add. Reiskeῖς χαλκοῦν· Hadjioannou Α' 12 || γορπιαίνου ante ras. U.

In this edition, the text is accompanied by the following comments, which form our starting point for discussion of the matter:<sup>4</sup>

16-17. κατακλινόμενον (...) γυναῖκες: Τὸ ἔθιμο, ὅπως σημειώνουν οἱ Κυρ. Χατζηϊωάννου καὶ Μ. Βαρβούνης The custom, as K. Hatzioannou and M. Varvounis note, (ΑΚΕΠ 5, 124 / ΜΑΜ pp. 18-19, with bibliography), belongs to the cycle of rituals known in the international terminology as the 'couvade' and in Greek as *arrenolobeia* (ἀρρενολοχεία [male pregnancy]) (See D. Loukatos, «Ὁ σύζυγος εἰς τὰ κατὰ τὴν γέννησιν ἔθιμα καὶ λαογραφικαὶ ἐνδείξεις περὶ ἀρρενολοχείας» [«The Spouse in Birth Rituals and Evidence from Folklore regarding the Couvade»], Ἐπετηρίς Λαογραφικοῦ Ἀρχείου 7 [1953] 124-68, On Cyprus: Papaharalambous *ΚυΗΕ* 40). It is not impossible that the custom has its origins in Minoan times (ΑΚΕΠ op.cit., see comments above, pp. 1ff.).

As the comment makes clear, there is information on male pregnancy in other ancient Greek sources. It should be stressed at the outset that we use this term to refer to the symbolic participation on the part of the spouse in the birth and that the internationally used term is *couvade*, which Loukatos translated as 'ἀρρενολοχεία' (*arrenolobeia*). Previous to this, Politis had used the term 'λοχεία συζύγου' (*loheia syzygou*, 'spouse pregnancy').<sup>5</sup> Loukatos' translation, however, is wholly successful and is used in the Greek literature on the subject.

In the words of Loukatos, '*arrenolobeia* in itself consists...of the spouse lying in immediately after the birth. He is entrusted in some fashion with the continuation of the pregnancy of his wife, as he lies on the bed and takes all the precautions taken by a woman who has just given birth. His wife is able to get up immediately and devote herself to the housework'. In fact, mention is made of similar practices on the part of various ancient

4. For commentary accompanying the passage, see ΑΚυΓ<sup>3</sup>, p. 613 and ΑΚυΓ<sup>4</sup>, p. 593-594. Cp. Κυρ. Χατζηϊωάννου, *Η Αρχαία Κύπρος εἰς τὰς Ἑλληνικὰς Πηγὰς* 5, Lefkosia 1983 (hereafter: ΑΚΕΠ), p. 124.

5. N. G. POLITIS, «Τα κατὰ τὴν γέννησιν», *Λαογραφικὰ Σύμμεκτα* 3, Athens 1931, p. 217-218.

peoples by a substantial number of ancient writers, such as Apollonius of Rhodes (*Argonautica* II, 1013-1016) and Zenobius (5, 25 in *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum* I, p. 127), who note similar customary practices on the part of the Tibani, a people of Scythian origin who inhabited the coast of Pontus. Customs involving the *couvade* are attributed by Strabo (III c 165) to the Iberians of Spain and by the Diodorus Siculus (V. 14.2) to the inhabitants of the island of Kyrnos, today Corsica,<sup>6</sup> while Marco Polo states that he came across the custom among the Mongols of southern China.<sup>7</sup>

In recent times, too, the custom has been noted among various peoples and in various regions. These include the Basques of Spain, while it has been traced in Corsica, the regions of northern Georgia and southern China, India, the Malacca peninsula, the Philippines, Borneo, Melanesia, the Congo, California and above all among many peoples of southern America and particularly among those in the southern tropics.<sup>8</sup>

In the view of the older classical ethnological and folklore literature on the subject, the custom of the *couvade* goes back to prehistoric times and indeed belongs to the period in which patriarchal societies were formed. It functioned as symbolic proof of paternity, so that the father reinforced his claim to the paternity of the child in symbolic terms, too through his participation in the birth itself. This was so, because, as Hartland<sup>9</sup> and Frazer<sup>10</sup> observed, 'awareness that the spouse was the source of the paternity of the child was notably slow to develop, because of ignorance of the biological mechanisms behind reproduction. The result was that in patriarchal and male-dominated familial and social contexts it was supplemented with similar magical practices, associative and symbolic.

The classical ethnological and anthropological bibliography offers many interpretations of the custom of the *couvade*. Bachofen,<sup>11</sup> as part of his theories on matriarchy and the move to patriarchy, was of the view that

6. See D. S. LOUKATOS, *op. cit.*, p. 124-125.

7. V. T. SKLOVSKI, *Το ταξίδι του Μάρκο Πόλο* (translated by K. I. Kapetanaki), Athens 1950, p. 163-164.

8. See R. CORSO, «La covata», *Douro-Litoral* 3-4 (1952), p. 8.

9. E. S. HARTLAND, *The Legend of Perseus* 2, London 1894-1896, p. 400 ff.

10. J. G. FRAZER, *Totemism and Exogamy* 4, London 1920, p. 244-245.

11. J. J. BACHOFEN, *Das Mutterrecht* 2, Stuttgart 1861, p. 629 ff.

the *couvade* functioned as the symbolic adoption of the newborn child by the father, so that the child belonged in legal and social terms to him, too, as well as to the mother. Thus the institution of the custom was to be placed at the point of change from a matriarchal system of inheritance to a patriarchal one.

Tylor,<sup>12</sup> on other hand, was also of the view that customs related to the *couvade* had their origin sympathetic magic and expressed the desire on the part of the father to contribute to the safe birth of the child. Such customs were thus an extension to the father of the biological functions of the mother during birth and so extended both to the whole duration of the pregnancy and to the subsequent period of confinement. Although Tylor may gradually have come to reject this interpretation and to adopt the viewpoint of Bachofen,<sup>13</sup> a number of notable studies, such as those by Hartland, Crawley<sup>14</sup> and Frazer upheld Tylor's original view and adduced various pieces of ethnological evidence to support it.

Furthermore, Crawley and Corso<sup>15</sup> enlarged this second theory, to maintain that customs relating to the *couvade* fundamentally rest upon the three-fold relations linking father, mother and child, that is, upon affection, common responsibility and mutual support, which form the deepest cohesive link in every family. This third view was an important attempt at interpreting the *couvade* as part of custom and society.

Finally, Samter<sup>16</sup> and Politis<sup>17</sup> offered a different interpretation of the *couvade*. In their view, it was a ritual attempt to deceive lurking demonic spirits, whose intention it was to harm mother and newborn child, and to drive them away. In this case, the attempt involves the practice of the ritual substitution of the endangered individual for another who is stronger and so less vulnerable.

12. Ed. TYLOR, *Researches into the early history of Mankind*, London 1878, p. 288.

13. See E. TYLOR, «A Method of investigating the Development of Institutions», *Journal of Anthropological Institute* 18 (1889), p. 245-272.

14. E. CRAWLEY, *The Mystic Rose* 2, London 1927 (2nd. ed.), p. 177-188.

15. R. CORSO, «Il mito della nascita di Minerva ed un racconto popolare della Corsica», *Folklore* 5 (1950), p. 12-15.

16. E. SAMTER, *Geburt, Hochzeit und Tod*, Leipzig 1911, p. 95.

17. Ν. Γ. Πολίτης, «Ωκυτόκια», *Λαογραφικά Σύμμεικτα* 2, Athens 1975 (2nd. ed.), p. 366-367.

There were other interpretations that went beyond the borders of ethnology and folklore, which, however, we will not deal with in any depth here. Perhaps only the views of Lafitau<sup>18</sup> on the moral responsibility of the husband in regard to the pregnancy are worth a mention. Lafitau's views rest on arguments theological in nature, which in his opinion become apparent through the *couvade*. Moreover, there is the interpretation offered by Müller,<sup>19</sup> according to which the husband becomes bedridden in punishment for the supposed evil he has done to his wife in subjecting her to the trial of pregnancy. This interpretation has a psychological texture to it and, like that offered by Lafitau, does not take account of the social and cultural dimensions of the phenomenon.

Loukatos, who was critical of these theories, thought that none of them on its own was capable of offering a correct interpretation of the custom and that a full understanding of the phenomenon required all of them. The symbolic adoption of the infant by the father and the confirmation of its paternity, the interest that a father naturally displays in his child, the father's inclination to contribute to the successful outcome of the pregnancy and his feelings of responsibility for matters connected with the birth all went to make up the foundations on which Loukatos felt that a full and satisfactory interpretation of the *couvade* and the ritual practices associated with it must rest.

As Frazer<sup>20</sup> noted, strictly speaking one should not speak of the *couvade* in itself, so much as of 'customs related to the *couvade*', since such customs, rather than being limited to the moment of birth itself, actually extend to before and after the birth, in the form of restrictions, precautions and observances of various laws imposed by custom. This was the view that Loukatos followed in his studies of similar customs associated with the *couvade* among Greeks. He gathered an enormous amount of ethnographical material from first-hand descriptions and from fieldwork, which he placed in the following categories:<sup>21</sup> A. *The husband before the birth* [τα signs – other activities] – B. *The husband during the birth* [moral support–physical

18. J. F. LAFITAU, *Moeurs des sauvages américains* I, Paris 1724, p. 259.

19. M. MULLER, «Chips from a German Workshop», in R. CORSO, «La covata», op. cit., p. 7.

20. J. G. FRAZER, op. cit., p. 254-255.

21. D. S. LOUKATOS, op. cit., p. 131-165.



help – magical activities (use of husband’s clothes – magic –removal of physical effects of husband –blows administered by shoe or belt –striding over the body of the wife – use of water by the husband, by the parents and chiefly by the mother-in-law for plashing, sprinkling and watering)] – C. *The husband after the birth* [immediate personal actions– indirect actions by means of the clothes of the wife–restoration of the health of the wife in confinement (adjustment of the womb –removal of stains and blemishes) –the husband helping the first steps of the wife after birth].

Having classified and studied this copious material, Loukatos concluded that the chief form of the *couvade*, which takes the form of incubatory lying down, does not occur in Greek folklore. Instead, there are various ritual forms, defined by custom, involving active support and participation on the part of the husband relating to the birth, which are regarded as customary obligations towards his wife and his child performed by the husband.<sup>22</sup> Thus we are dealing here with ‘customs of the cycle of the *couvade*’ that are features of the ritual role of the husband in the context of customs relating to birth, parallels for which can be found among other peoples, as the literature makes clear.

Loukatos returned to the subject some years later in his examination of the mythological subject of the father who himself gives birth, as is the case with the birth of Athena and of Dionysus.<sup>23</sup> This theme, the father who gives birth in proper manner, producing children from his belly, had been examined earlier by Corso, who attributed its presence to the survival, in a refined form, of an early folk belief. Loukatos also found the subject in Greek folktales from Epirus, Thrace, Korone in Messenia, from the islands of Skyros and of Lemnos and from Carystus, on Euboea. These all belong to folklore types AaTh-Uther 400 and 408.

Loukatos also linked these tales to narratives regarding the father who gives birth from his thigh to children, those ‘nurtured by the thigh’ (μηροτραφείς, *mētrotrapeis*) that are found in mythological tradition. The references to such cases in the sources and in the iconography were

22. D. S. ΛΟΥΚΑΤΟΣ, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

23. D. S. ΛΟΥΚΑΤΟΣ, «Πατήρ τίκτων. Σχετικά περιπτώσεις εις δύο τύπους παραμυθιών», *Επετηρίς Λαογραφικού Αρχείου* 11-12 (1958-1959), p. 27-42, where analytical reference is made to the tales and folksongs referred to by Loukatos.

studied by Lambrinouidakis.<sup>24</sup> Here we have folklore types AaTh- Uther 705, StTh T 578 and T 578.1, parallels to which can be found in Greek folk tale narrative, recorded on Lesbos. Parallels can also be found in the words of folk songs from Thrace, Zakynthos, the Corinthia, Kozani, Kefallenia, Megara, Smyrna, Cyprus, Samos, Ayvali, Euboea, Chios and Ithaca.. These narratives most certainly echo magico-religious concepts and ritual practices that may be part of the customary practices and concepts involving the *couvade* analysed above.

The *couvade*, as Riviere observes,<sup>25</sup> has attracted the interest of social anthropologists, ethnologists and folklorists, since it combines a complexity of ritual display with the suspicion that it has profoundly ancient origins. Systematic research has shown that practices involving the *couvade* occur among many peoples throughout the world, their typology being particularly complex and full.<sup>26</sup> Other records of the phenomenon have shown that the *couvade* is directly present in, or lies behind, the birth customs of other peoples and regions, such as the Huaorani,<sup>27</sup> various regions of England,<sup>28</sup> of north<sup>29</sup> and south America,<sup>30</sup> the islands of the Caribbean,<sup>31</sup>

24. See B. LAMBRINOUDAKIS, Μηροτραφής: Μελέτη περί της γονιμοποιού τρώσεως ή δεσμεύσεως του ποδός εν τη αρχαία ελληνική μυθολογία, Athens 1971, where the international literature on the subject up to 1971 is given.

25. Peter G. RIVIERE, «The couvade: a problem reborn», *Man* 74 (1974), p. 423-435.

26. Warren ROYAL DAWSON, *The custom of couvades*, Manchester University Press, 1929, p. 34 ff.

27. Laura RIVAL, «Androgynous parents and guest children: the Huaorani couvades», *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4.3 (1998), p. 619-642.

28. W. S. INMAN, «The couvade in modern England», *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 19.1 (1941), p. 37-55. Winifred S. BLACKMAN, «Traces of Couvade (?) in England», *Folklore* 29.4 (1918), p. 319-321.

29. Arthur RUBEL-Joseph SPIELBERG, «Aspects of the couvade in Texas and Northeast Mexico», in *Summa Anthropologica en Homenaje a Roberto J. Weitlaner*, London 1966, p. 123 ff. see also Alfred Métraux, «The couvades», *Handbook of South American Indians* 5 (1949), p. 369-374.

30. Niels FOCK, «South American birth customs in theory and practice», *Folk* 2 (1960), p. 51-69. Cp. and D. Wayland HAND, «American Analogues of the Couvade», in W. Edson RICHMOND (ed.), *Studies in Folklore*, Bloomington, Indiana 1957, p. 213-29.

31. Robert L. MUNROE, *Couvade practices of the Black Carib: A psychological study*, Diss., Harvard University, 1964. Ruy COELHO, «The significance of the couvade among the Black Caribs», *Man: A monthly record of anthropological science* 63-78 (1949), p. 51-53.

Guyana,<sup>32</sup> groups of Jewish origin,<sup>33</sup> areas of Albania,<sup>34</sup> Estonia,<sup>35</sup> Sweden,<sup>36</sup> the Basques in the Iberian peninsula,<sup>37</sup> a fairly large number of Balkan peoples,<sup>38</sup> areas of Canada,<sup>39</sup> Senegal,<sup>40</sup> areas of Ireland,<sup>41</sup> areas of central, south<sup>42</sup> and east Africa.<sup>43</sup> The literature also refers to the presence of the *couvade* in a large number of works of literature,<sup>44</sup> where it forms an important part of the structure and plot.

At the same time, some of the literature has located practices connected with the *couvade* in the personality and work of various historical personages<sup>45</sup> and behind the creation of important works of art. A main concern of the anthropological literature, which is frequently marked by conflicting views

32. Michael GILKES, *Couvade: a dream-play of Guyana*, Longman Caribbean, 1974. Christopher BALME, «The Caribbean Theatre of Ritual: Derek Walcott's Dream on Monkey Mountain, Michael Gilkes's Couvade: A Dream-Play of Guyana, and Dennis Scott's An Echo in the Bone», in K. H. PETERSEN, A. RUTHERFORD (eds.), *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial*, Dangaroo Press 1992, p. 181-195.

33. Daniel BOYARIN, «Jewish Masochism: Couvade, Castration, and Rabbis in Pain», *American Imago* 51 (1994), p. 3.

34. Margaret HASLUCK, «Couvade in Albania», *Man* 39.2 (1939), p. 18-20.

35. Felix J. OINAS, «Couvade in Estonia», *Slavic and East European Journal* 7 (1993), p. 339-345.

36. Torborg LUNDELL, «Couvade in Sweden», *Scandinavian Studies* 71 (1999), p. 93-104.

37. Rodney GALLOP, «Couvade and the Basques», *Folklore* 47.3 (1936), p. 310-313.

38. Tatmir P. VUKANOVIĆ, «Traces of Couvade among Balkan Peoples», *Folklore* 70.3 (1959), p. 468-476.

39. H. J. ROSE, «"Couvade" in Ontario», *Folklore* 29.1 (1918), p. 87.

40. Hans-Dieter EVERS, «Magic and religion in Sinhalese society», *American Anthropologist* 67 (1965), p. 97-99.

41. Bryan J. Jones-W. B. YEATS, «Traditions and Superstitions Collected at Kilcurry, County Louth, Ireland», *Folklore* 10.1 (1899), p. 119-123.

42. Annie DUPUIS, «L'homme musombi: la couvade chez les Nzebi (Gabon)», στο βιβλίο S. LALLEMAND, *Grossesse et petite enfance en Afrique noire et à Madagascar*, L'Harmattan 1991, p. 77-102.

43. Jack Herbert DRIBERG, «A Note on the Classification of Half-Hamites in East Africa», *Man* (1939), p. 20-21.

44. Barrie R. WALKLEY, «The Bloom of Motherhood: Couvade as a Structural Device in "Ulysses"», *James Joyce Quarterly* 18 (1980), p. 55-67. See also F. L. NEWMAN, «Some references to the couvade in literature», *Folklore* 53.3 (1942), p. 148-157 and C. F. VOEGELIN, «Pregnancy couvade attested by term and text in Hopi», *American Anthropologist* 62.3 (1960), p. 491-494. For a study over time of these references, see Nicholas Shane JOHNSON, *Jovial Pregnancies: Couvade and Culture from Shakespeare to Milton*, ProQuest, 2009.

45. Daniel RANCOUR-LAFERRIERE, «The Couvade of Peter the Great: A Psychoanalytic Aspect of The Bronze Horseman», in David BETHEA (ed.), *Pushkin Today*, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 99-118.

and responses and responses to responses by scholars and researchers,<sup>46</sup> is the attempt to interpret the origin and real substance and function of the *couvade* in various traditional communities.<sup>47</sup> As Ruggles notes,<sup>48</sup> the aim of this is to establish how this ritual custom functioned in particular social and cultural contexts.

The folklore and ethnographic literature again places an emphasis on interpretations that have been suggested when the *couvade* is seen in the context of the set of customs relating to the first stage of the life cycle. As Doja<sup>49</sup> notes, this may help scholars to discern the particular custom in question in its real ritual context, so as to allow a fuller interpretation. When seen as part of the whole of customs relating to birth, the *couvade* acquires a particular importance, since it is to be linked with all the magical practices whose aim is the support, expressed through symbolism and analogical magic, during the biological processes involved in birth<sup>50</sup> in the absence of medical and biological knowledge and of technology in traditional communities among various peoples.<sup>51</sup>

A fair number of scholars have observed that magical concepts and ritual acts connected with the *couvade* establish the boundaries of groups of

46. See, for example, Robert L. MUNROE-Ruth H. MUNROE, «A Response to Broude on the Couvade», *American Anthropologist* 91.3 (1989), p. 730-735. See also Lucile NEWMAN, «The couvade: a reply to Kupferer», *American Anthropologist* 68.1 (1966), p. 153-156.

47. C. U. I. DE-WANG, «A Probe into» Couvade», *Yin Shan Academic Journal* 2 (2003), p. 15. See also Gwen J. BROUDE, «A Reply to Munroe and Munroe on the Couvade», *American Anthropologist* 91.3 (1989), p. 735-738. Ethel H. RUDKIN, «Couvade», *Folklore* 45.2 (1934), p. 158-158. Antony ESSEX-CATER, «The Couvade», *Man* 53.9 (1953), p. 144. Wilhelm SCHMIDT, *Das Mutterrecht*, Verlag der Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel, 1955.

48. Gates R. RUGGLES, «An explanation for the couvades», *Man* 44 (1944), p. 55.

49. Albert DOJA, «Rethinking the couvades», *Anthropological Quarterly* 78.4 (2005), p. 917-950.

50. Cp. Patrick MENGET, M. IZARD, P. SMITH, «Temps de naître, temps d'être: la couvades», in *La fonction symbolique*, Paris 1979, p. 245-64. See also Patrick MENGET, «Time of birth, time of being: the couvades», in M. IZARD, P. SMITH (eds.), *Between belief and transgression: structuralist essays in religion, history, and myth*, special issue, *American Ethnologist* 11.3 (1984), p. 627-629.

51. Richard K. REED, *Birthing fathers: The transformation of men in American rites of birth*, Rutgers University Press, 2005.

customs that possess a particular orientation and function.<sup>52</sup> These customs form part of those relating to birth, although they are independent in themselves and possess their own nature in terms of ritual. In fact Broude<sup>53</sup> is of the view that only a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary examination of the *couvade* will help scholars towards any reliable view of the phenomenon. When viewed in this way, the *couvade* is frequently regarded as an attempt to define the husband in social terms and to define his participation in the events of paternity and parturition<sup>54</sup> in terms of the creation and formation of gender and in particular during times and conditions of transition from one social and cultural system to another, something that frequently occurs in primitive and subsistence societies.<sup>55</sup>

The *couvade* has also been the object of research in psychology and psychiatry, centring on the so-called *couvades* syndrome, which involves a series of pregnancy symptoms that are manifested by spouses of pregnant women.<sup>56</sup> There has been enormous discussion on the subject, which mainly concerns the origins, the symptoms and the reasons for the condition.<sup>57</sup> In fact, certain scholars who have systematically investigated the *couvade* syndrome wonder whether it is an illness or some customary practice that rests on psychological bases, reasons and causes,<sup>58</sup> and so are unsure as to

52. See on this Clyde H. WILSON, Aram A. YENGOYAN, «An Example of Adaptation by the Formation of Ritual Groups», *Michigan Discussions in Anthropology* 1 (1976), p. 111-133. Clyde H. WILSON, *Couvade: An Example of Adaptation by the Formation of Ritual Groups*, Ann Arbor, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 1976.

53. Gwen J. BROUDE, «Rethinking the Couvade: Cross-Cultural Evidence», *American Anthropologist* 90.4 (1988), p. 902-911.

54. See Arthur BRENNAN (et al.), «A qualitative exploration of the couvade syndrome in expectant fathers», *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology* 25.1 (2007), p. 18-39. See also Mary Douglas, «Couvade and menstruation: The relevance of tribal studies», in *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology*, London – Boston 1975, p. 432-34.

55. P. SUMMERSGILL, «Couvade-the retaliation of marginalised fathers», in J. ALEXANDER -V. LEVY, S. ROCH (eds.), *Midwifery practice: A research based approach*, New York 1993, p. 91-109.

56. William H. TRETOWAN, Michael F. CONLON, «The couvade syndrome», *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 111.470 (1965), p. 57-66.

57. Robert L. MUNROE-Ruth H. MUNROE-John W. WHITING, «The couvade: A psychological analysis», *Ethos* 1.1 (1973), p. 30-74. See also Lennart Y. BOGREN, «Couvade», *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 68.1 (1983), p. 55-65.

58. See in Mack LIPKIN-Gerri S. LAMB, «The couvade syndrome: an epidemiologic study», *Annals of Internal Medicine* 96.4 (1982), p. 509-511. See also Arthur BRENNAN (et al.), «A critical

whether one should regard it and deal with it in medical or anthropological terms. At the same time, the prevailing view is that it is a phenomenon psychosomatic in origin,<sup>59</sup> which derives from psychological causes. It is sometimes interpreted as a sign of latent homosexuality<sup>60</sup> or as a ritual version of gender role change,<sup>61</sup> which is found in many related folk rituals of various peoples throughout the world.

All the foregoing, then, goes to form the interpretative framework in which our extract from Paeon is to be set and examined: Does the passage in question offer anything new to our interpretation and knowledge of the *couvade* or is it simply yet another testimony to the existence of this ritual and so will not yield anything of particular importance when analysed? To this question, which is linked to the contribution made by the present article to the literature, we will presently offer an answer.

The passage suggests that, rather than dealing with a genuine case of the *couvade* on the part of the husband in the context of childbirth, we have in fact a symbolic, ritual performance that formed part of some folk ritual in antiquity that occurred during the festivities and sacrifices in honour of Ariadne, which Theseus was supposed to have instituted:<sup>62</sup> «ἐν δὲ τῇ θυσίᾳ τοῦ Γορπιαίου μηρὸς ἰσταμένου δευτέρᾳ κατακλινόμενόν τινα τῶν νεανίσκων φθέγγεσθαι καὶ ποιεῖν ἄπερ ὠδίνουσαι γυναῖκες» ('He says also that at the

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review of the couvade syndrome: the pregnant male», *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology* 25.3 (2007), p. 173-189 καὶ Harriet J. K. KUPFERER, «Couvade: Ritual or Real Illness», *American Anthropologist* 67.1 (1965), p. 99-102.

59. Hilary KLEIN, «Couvade syndrome: male counterpart to pregnancy», *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* 21.1 (1991), p. 57-69. William H. TRETOWAN, «The couvade syndrome-some further observations», *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 12.1 (1968), p. 107-115.

60. Patrick J. GRAY-Jane E. ELLINGTON, «Institutionalized male transvestism, the couvade, and homosexual behavior», *Ethos* 12.1 (1984), p. 54-63.

61. Robert L. MUNROE, «Male Transvestism and the Couvade: A Psycho-Cultural Analysis», *Ethos* 8.1 (1980), p. 49-59.

62. Cp. on this T. B. L. WEBSTER, «The Myth of Ariadne from Homer to Catullus», *Greece & Rome* 13 (1966), p. 22-31. D. B. IKONOMIDES, «Ο Διόνυσος καὶ ἡ Αριάδνη ἐν Νάξῳ», *Επετηρὶς Κυκλαδικῶν Μελετῶν* 12 (1995), p. 24-40. M. ΚΟΥΤΣΟΥΔΑΚΙ, *The Dionysiac Myth in Camus and Williams*, Athens [University of Athens, S. Saripolos Library 54] 1987. On Cyprus: B. ΚΑΡΑΓΙΟΡΓΗΣ, Ἑλληνες θεοὶ καὶ ἥρωες στὴν ἀρχαία Κύπρον, Athens 1998, p. 86-87, 131, 176, 204-5, 274, 303 / 228-33 / 272 κ. εξ. καὶ J. ΚΑΡΑΓΕΟΡΓΗΣ, *Kypris. The Aphrodite of Cyprus: Ancient sources and archaeological evidence*, Nicosia 2005, p. 75 ff. [mainly p. 77 ff. «Theseus and Ariadne»], with literature and full range of illustrations.

sacrifice in her honor on the second day of the month Gorpiaeus, one of their young men lies down and imitates the cries and gestures of women in travail.’).

Thus we are at the point of transition here from life-cycle customs, however they are to be interpreted, to the customs of the annual festal cycle. In other words, we are at the point of transition from customs to rituals, and to be more precise from private custom to the world of public ritual, from family to the communal and the social.<sup>63</sup> This particular form of the practice of the *couvade*, a custom which occurs in its original form as an ‘incubatory lying in’, is not intended to bring about any particular birth nor to offer any magical protection for the pregnant woman and for her child. Nor is it intended to offer symbolic confirmation of paternity, but to ensure the fertility and fecundity of the community as a whole. Given, of course, that this particular *couvade* ritual was part of an annual religious festival, it is clearly liminal, concerned with fertility and is a rite of transition.<sup>64</sup>

There is considerable discussion in the literature on rituals of transition and liminality, that is, on rituals that accompany the yearly customs of the festal calendar and are tied to the transitional character that is popularly assigned to the stages of the yearly cycle of the festal calendar.<sup>65</sup> This aspect, concerning fertility, of these rituals is firmly linked to popular conceptions regarding liminal days and moments and the collapse of barriers at such

63. See on this, F. BOWIE, *The Anthropology of Religion. An Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, 20062, p. 139. O. J. GOODY, «Religion and Ritual: the Definitional Problem», *The British Journal of Sociology* (1961), p. 159 defines as *ritus* established human behaviour. M. GLUCKMAN, *Essay on the Ritual of Social Relations*, Manchester 1962, p. 1 ff. casts doubt on the separation between religious and secular elements in ritual. On the relationship between secular and sacred elements in ritual, see also Allen GUTTMANN, *From ritual to record*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1978. H. R. BENEDICT, «Ritual», *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* 13-14, New York 1968, p. 396 ff. defines ritual as a form of predefined and elaborated behaviour that comes across as innovative and original behavior by individuals. See Β. Πούχγερ, Θεωρητική Λαογραφία. Έννοιες – Μέθοδοι – Θεματικές, Athens 2009, op. cit., p. 191-192 and n. 39. Cp. Tom Faw DRIVER, *Liberating rites: Understanding the transformative power of ritual*, Boulder CO, Westview Press, 1998.

64. See the comments of Wilhelm SCHMIDT, *Gebräuche des Ehemannes bei Schwangerschaft und Geburt: mit Richtigstellung des Begriffes der Couvade*, Herold, 1955, p. 23-34.

65. VICTOR W. TURNER, *Celebration: Studies in festivity and ritual*, Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982, p. 123 ff. Cp. T. M. S. EVENS-D. HANDELMAN (eds.), *The Manchester School. Practice and Ethnographic praxis in anthropology*, New York 1972. See also M. SIGNER, *When a great tradition modernizes*, New York 1972, p. 71.



moments between the natural and supernatural worlds. At such times, the dead return to the world above and exist alongside the living, to return to the kingdom of the dead after the ritual termination of the period.

The existence of spirits from the world below and in particular of the souls of dead ancestors that are important for purposes of fertility and whose location makes them both of the world below and yet benign,<sup>66</sup> is the factor that ensures that any rite of transition is connected with fertility. In our case, the *couvade* ritual is removed from its setting of custom and is placed in a festal framework. Thus it transfers a benefit enjoyed by the individual and by the family to society as a whole and so extends the fertility of the moment to a good that is sought and pursued through ritual.

In this sense, then, our particular case is an example of the progressive change of private rituals into communal rites of passage. This change occurs through the presentation of such rituals in theatrical terms. The ritual as described by Paeon of Amathus is a typical form of performance that foreshadows the theatre. It is a primordial form of theatrical act.<sup>67</sup> The theatricality here is linked to the fact that the *couvade* is in this case moved from the level of practical application in the case of a particular birth to a theatrical rendering of the ritual.<sup>68</sup> At this level, it does not have an individual or familial application. It is not intended to ease the delivery of any particular woman and is an impersonal, generalized ritual means to achieve fertility and a good and productive year.

We have here the ritual origins of what Puchner terms the ‘anticipatory forms of popular theatre’.<sup>69</sup> The reference in Paeon, when seen against what

66. See M. G. MERAKLES, «‘Νερό φρέσκο που ξεπήδαγε από τους αιώνες’: Η χθόνια φύση του νερού», in *Θέματα Λαογραφίας*, Athens 1999, p. 183-189.

67. V. TURNER, *From Ritual to Theater and Back: the Human Seriousness of Play*, New York 1982, p. 79. Cp. *idem*, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, New York 1967, p. 25 ff. For this view of ritual, see Bobby Chris ALEXANDER, *Victor Turner revisited: ritual as social change*, Scholars Press, 1991. V. TURNER, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, New York - London 1974, p. 32-35. *idem*, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-structure*, New York 1991, with older bibliography.

68. Cp. Natan MARGALIT, «Priestly Men and Invisible Women: Male Appropriation of the Feminine and the Exemption of Women from Positive Time-Bound Commandments», *AJS Review* 28.2 (2004), p. 297-316.

69. See on this B. PUCHNER, *Λαϊκό θέατρο στην Ελλάδα και στα Βαλκάνια (συγκριτική μελέτη)*, Athens 1989, p. 14-19.



we have mentioned regarding the *couvade* and the customs associated with it, offers us the chance to detect and trace the development into theatre of ancient fertility rituals. Such an opportunity is rare both in antiquity and in the whole of folk culture over time.<sup>70</sup> This progressive development, which moves from the private and familial to the public also brought about the beginnings of an increasing secularization, since it contained the seeds of the phenomenon that Augé termed the ‘demagification’ of the world.<sup>71</sup> This was a world that for ancient man was actuated by supernatural powers and so was magical in all its structure and manifestations.

The theatrical representation of ancient archetypal rituals, as Paeon in his brief description hints that the ritual he mentions was, was a widespread phenomenon, out of which public ritual gradually grew. Such representation strengthened the communicative aspects and structure of these rituals and led to the development of a whole world of mentalities and concepts that, as archetypal elements are frequently paralleled by the various ritual performances of folk culture.<sup>72</sup>

Essentially, Paeon of Amathus shows in this extract the passage from (a very particular) custom to ritual drama, in this case the *couvade*. And therein lies his special contribution, in that he indirectly emphasizes the value of a close study of the particular passage from the point of view of folklore.

70. C. STEWART, «Χρόνος, τελετουργία και τελεολογία», *Αρχαιολογία* 76 (2000), p. 26-34. O. K. Köstlin maintains that the repetition of rituals nourishes collective memory. See K. KÖSTLIN, P. NIEDERMÜLLER, H. NIKITSCH (eds.), *Die Wende als Wende? Orientierungen Europäischer Ethnologien nach 1989*, Wien 2002, p. 9-11. The same is true of repeated church rituals. See W. PUCHNER, «Griechisches zur adoptio in fratrem», *Südost - Forschungen* 54 (1994), p. 187-224, which deals with ‘brother-making’. S. Kracauer, *Geschichte – Vor den letzten Dingen*, Frankfurt 1973, p. 37 incorporates them in the «Sphäre der Trägheit». See also Irwin Z. HOFFMAN, *Ritual and spontaneity in the psychoanalytic process: A dialectical-constructivist view*, Routledge, 2014, p. 65. See the findings of Jonathan Z. SMITH, *To take place: Toward theory in ritual*, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

71. M. AUGE, Για μια ανθρωπολογία των σύγχρονων κόσμων (trans. D. Sarafidou), Athens 1999, p. 45. Cp. E. Avdikos, «Από την προξενήτρα στο γραφείο συνοικεσίων. Παραδοσιακότητα και νεωτερικότητα στον αστικό χώρο», Πρακτικά Επιστημονικού Συμποσίου «Το παρόν του παρελθόντος: Ιστορία, Λαογραφία, Κοινωνική Ανθρωπολογία», Athens 2003, p. 152.

72. See on this Randall COLLINS, *Interaction ritual chains*, Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 87. Cp. Jean COMAROFF, John L. COMAROFF (eds.), *Modernity and its malcontents: Ritual and power in postcolonial Africa*, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 12 and introduction in Sally FALK MOORE, Barbara G. MYERHOFF (eds.), *Secular ritual*, Uitgeverij Van Gorcum, 1977, p. 9-10.

