

Overview

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Iamblichus begins his *De mysteriis Ægyptiorum* by noting that, in ancient times, the Egyptians attributed all the discoveries of their own wisdom to the god Hermes, the master of words, and signed all their writings with his name. Giambattista Vico recalls this remark when attempting to explain what “Poetic Characters” are: products of the imagination of the Age of Heroes, of the deep past. Struggling with what was then still an awkward language, the people of that time employed a single name for many similar phenomena, using the name of Achilles to evoke all the properties of Heroic Valor, and the name of Ulysses to conjure up all the properties of Heroic Wisdom. They did not yet know how to tame the power of the feelings that constantly overwhelmed them, and therefore, creating these composite characters, they attributed to them an exaltedness that found quite literal expression in gigantic figures of superhuman size.

If, as the teachings of the Neapolitan philosopher suggest, within the next thousand years our enlightened age will once again give way to a time of barbarism, and a new civilization will spring from its fertile soil, then it cannot be excluded that the coming Age of Heroes will endow the Poetic Character of a scholar who is able to understand the intricacies of narratives concerning the fate of gods and men with the name of Nina Vladimirovna Braginskaya. In any case, the scale and variety of what she has created, and continues to create in our time, is astonishing: can all this be within the grasp of a single person? And what is most surprising is not the variety of questions she has studied or the number of pages she has written, but the fact that Nina Vladimirovna’s work has been paradigmatic for Russian scholarship on antiquity for decades — and not only in the encomiastic meaning of the word, but also the meaning that the term παράδειγμα possessed in the Platonic tradition.

There are two ways to navigate this book. Nina Vladimirovna is present in it as a scholar in honor of whose anniversary other scholars, with various specialties and from various parts of the globe, have come together to present their colleague with a traditional gift in the academic world: a book of contributions. The joyful, celebratory occasion for the book’s creation is the reason why it contains more than just *strict* academic research. At the gateway to this collection of studies lie texts whose authors — friends, colleagues and allies of Nina Vladimirovna, a poet and a historian of religions — interpret both the path her research took and her personality in the forms and through the topics most familiar and enjoyable to them. At the same time, Nina Vladimirovna is also present in the book as an ideologist and as the person behind research based on one and the same foundations, using related methods and focused on structurally similar objects, even if the authors of this research — representatives

of different branches of the humanities — address very different genres of academic culture. We have grouped our authors according to the very familiar nomenclature of specialisms to help the reader navigate the monograph: “Orientalists” (“Orientalia”), “Classicists” (“Classica et paleochristiana”), and “Medievalists” (“Medioevalia”). Nina Vladimirovna’s interest in the study of the archaic mythology of both European and non-European cultures (and not only ancient cultures, but also those that exist to this day) has also inspired a special section of the book devoted to chthonic creatures and subjects: “Miracles and Monsters” (“Portenta ac monstra”).

However, the thinking behind the project that resulted in this book, and the links between the individual studies included in our monograph, naturally go far beyond individual disciplines or the classification of research areas in library catalogs. What unites the authors of this book in spite of the disparate genres of their studies (from a linguistic commentary on a monument of ancient literature to a learned *drôlerie*) and the “huge distances” that separate their subjects, both geographical (from Ireland to Mongolia) and temporal (from the Old Kingdom of Egypt to the Second World War)? In the most general way, we could say that the authors are linked by their interest in tracing specific histories of culturally significant meanings, in following their trajectories over long expanses of time — centuries, and sometimes even millennia. But this explanation can hardly be considered satisfactory. After all, for a historian or philologist, unlike a “pure” philosopher, it is not only, and often not even primarily, the meanings themselves that are important. The research credo of this project’s participants is that meaning always has a material side, and when we turn to meaning, we always find it in a certain concrete historical embodiment. And the vicissitudes of the shared life of meaning and its material side — their simultaneous or, on the contrary, asynchronous birth, separations and emancipations, betrayals and reunions, the death of one side and the continued life of the other, their remembering or forgetting of each other — all these transformations of the relationship between the immaterial content and its material vessel deserve the closest attention. It is irrelevant whether we are dealing with a term in the hieratic language or a physical, tangible thing endowed with a sacred status, an earthly *lieu de mémoire* or a series of verbal or visual images and its interpretation; whether just a single word once part of a ritual is under investigation, as in the article by T.A. Mikhailova, the subject of ritual vestments, as in the essay by G. Bohak, a city, as in the work of M.G. Seleznev, or, as in most of the studies included in the book, a mythological narrative clothed in verbal and visual texts of various genres. Meanings can embark on odysseys across history, leaving the forms and contexts in which they once lived and merging into new ones. But the adventures of the substrates with which meanings connect — words, things, places, and images — can be even more exciting. Like the Sophia of the Gnostics, having almost lost their connection with the meanings that were originally assigned to them (and as reservoirs for which they were sometimes created), these substrates are able nevertheless to retain a vague memory of their original meanings, and build on this memory for centuries, laying down on its impressions generated by existing in new historical and cultural circumstances and assimilating ever more new content. They can change almost beyond recognition — like the winged monsters that accompanied the Phoenician Astarte, who, as Nina Vladimirovna noted, turned into beautiful young men, Erotes in

the iconography of Aphrodite. The study of the “memory of things” is particularly interesting when, as so often happens, the reinterpretation of topoi and images takes indirect paths, obeying a non-classical logic of fragmentation, asynchronous development, re-accentuation, literalization or, conversely, metaphorization, or Freudian laws of partial destruction or substitution of the contents of memory. These dreamlike logics of the assimilation of meanings, their rearrangement or their partial or complete erasure, leave many areas of shadow in the historical destinies of things, places, and images. At the same time, they open up the broadest possibilities for discovering unexpected connections between them: similarities or kinship. The researcher who studies a series of historical shifts in the semantics of realia is an archaeologist, combining academic erudition and the rational art of interpretation with a master craftsman’s feel for his material and the luck of a gold digger: with accidents and combinations of historical circumstances that do not obey any laws. In the study of such historical transformations, the mechanisms and effects of forgetting are often more interesting than the mechanisms and effects of remembering.

Anna Ilyinichna Shmaina-Velikanova, outlining the principal milestones of Nina Vladimirovna’s research career, lingers over one of her literary and archaeological experiments. The result of this experiment was the discovery of kinship between the Sumerian myth of Enki, who hid in the swamps to attack his own daughters and indulge in incest with them, and the story of a Danish prince who, in the early versions of his biography, hides with his beloved in a swamp in an impenetrable thicket in a forest, and in later, nobler versions, loses her when she drowns in a stream to whose banks she had come to collect flowers. But no less significant is Nina Vladimirovna’s purely European genealogy of *Hamlet*, which spans just five centuries. This archaeological reconstruction of Shakespeare’s plot will help us come to a general understanding of how the method of “memory of things and places”, so often used by the authors of this book, works.

Nina Vladimirovna’s eye is drawn to the fact that Ophelia, shortly before her tragic death, breaks off her scabrous singing to provide explanations of the medicinal properties of flowers from a bouquet that she carries with her everywhere. Even more strangely, when telling the story of her death, Gertrude for some reason gives the names of the plants from which Ophelia was weaving wreaths when she fell into the river. If Ophelia’s sudden passion for apothecary nomenclature can be explained by insanity, which is sometimes very attentive to details, it is difficult to justify the reappearance of the floral theme in the queen’s speech to Laertes, who is shocked by the news of the deaths of his father and sister. As Nina Vladimirovna sees it, the choice of the site of Ophelia’s death and the resurfacing details of the plants around her reveal a memory of the plot as Saxo Grammaticus had it, i.e. in its original version (which many researchers believe was unfamiliar to the author of the *Hamlet* we know today). Saxo relates how the king, skeptical of Amlet’s madness and considering him a dangerous pretender, decides to test him. To do so, he sends a seductress to him — because, according to Saxo, only an imbecile can refuse the pleasures of physical love, while a healthy and mentally well-developed young man will immediately take advantage of the opportunity presented. The cunning and suspicious Amlet and the sympathetic girl hide in a swamp in the forest and there, far from the spies, make love. Then the

supposed madman tells what essentially is the truth, listing the names of the plants on which he was obliged to lie during his tryst in the swamp. But no one believes Amlet: his speech seems nonsensical. As the plot evolved over time — from Saxo to Shakespeare (whoever he was) — the scene of copulation with the seductress sent to Amlet in the swamp changed beyond recognition, turning into Ophelia's death by drowning in a stream. However, the emotional background of the story and its power dynamics remained: the pretense of the young hero who is at constant risk of becoming another victim of the usurper king, the king's refusal to believe in the madness of the young man, the desire to show him up and the failed act of espionage/seduction involving the heroine, who simultaneously wants to please the usurper and not harm her beloved. Meanwhile, the figure of the unwilling seductress remains somehow connected with the element of water and with plants, whose names are given a certain significance in the development of the story. The role of plant names may be key: Saxo Grammaticus' Amlet tells the truth about his relationship with the seductress, but in the names listed by him one might see either real objects (a horse's hoof, rooster's combs, roof panels), in which case Amlet is delusional, or else metaphorical, folk names of plants, in which case he is frankly and accurately recounting what happened between him and the seductress. However, the role of the plant-related details may also seem to fade away, as is the case in Shakespeare's tragedy. The names of plants that once, long ago, in Saxo Grammaticus, served as Amlet/Hamlet's marriage bed are spoken by Ophelia and then by the queen, in a vague, almost obliterated memory of the origins of the plot, not quite appropriate in the delirium of madness and the emotional story of the tragic death of an innocent being. Yet the significance of the swampy site, coupled with the image of the seductress, actually increases in the tragedy: the heroine of the medieval saga was joined in marriage to her lover in the swamp, while the Shakespearean heroine is destined to "muddy death" before she can marry.

All the works included in our monograph belong to the paradigm of research on the historical semantics of subjects, and of the images and words related to them. The objects of our authors' attention may differ in their fates and scales, but there is a profound similarity between their fates that, to use Yuri Lotman's terminology, could be called topological. They can be material objects, or combinations of them: items that are used in rituals or endowed with particular authority in certain societies; places in space; or the body in its most literal, i.e. physiological, manifestations. They can also be virtual objects: the body as an agent of the social world, or the body spiritualized and transformed into a system of allegories; details of ekphrases, fantastical creatures, imagined territories and symbolic spaces. They can also be entire fields of communication: rituals, social practices (from private symposia to public festivals), and the oral and written genres that are rooted in these practices. These spheres are encompassed and permeated by the language in which they all speak in one way or another: that of myth, which appears in our book in its various historical guises, from the macabre and chthonic to the malleable and classical, from a source of archetypes to a reservoir of allegories and examples that have taken root in a philosophical community.

In this *outline of the idea* behind the project we will attempt to demonstrate and justify the second way to navigate this monograph, which should make up for a certain formalism inherent in the arrangement of this book's articles. To create an alter-

native panorama of the connections and relationships (perhaps not always self-evident) between the studies included in the book, we will begin with the smallest units that have meanings: things and words.

The subject of Gideon Bohak's research is the vestments worn by the priests of the Temple in Jerusalem, which ceased to exist in 70 AD but remained in the memory of the bearers of tradition as "ritual objects of the historical imagination, about which one may speak, write, and fantasize", and first and foremost as "an object with great magical powers". When they were still part of the divine service performed in the Temple, priestly vestments were endowed with an important symbolic meaning, not only in the space of worship, but also in the political space. This symbolic trail left by ritual vestments outlives both the vestments themselves and the rituals in which they played a part. It is no coincidence that, in Jewish literature, ekphrases and interpretations of priestly garments continue to appear centuries after the garments themselves cease to exist, being man-made and therefore subject to corruption. Thus, things become symbols, losing their context-dependency and their concreteness, but acquiring a meaning that claims to be long-lived, not comparable to the lifespan of a material object. However, the disappearance of the material substrate has another consequence. A thing that was once endowed with a sacred status (in Bohak's study, this is part of the headdress of the high priest, the so-called diadem of sanctity with the name of the Almighty carved into it) disappears from the biblical text in which it is mentioned for the first time in its history, on the one hand, and drops out of use in the temple rituals which had assigned certain functions and meanings to it but which were half-forgotten by the end of classical antiquity, on the other hand. Thus, freeing itself from most of its concrete historical connections, it finds its way into the magical texts of late antiquity, including pagan texts. The fate of the diadem of sanctity, which in a late antique incantation appears, in keeping with the eclectic tastes of this era, next to the name of the god Helios, shows how magic arises where once there was religion. For the author of the spell, the diadem has become what Roland Barthes calls a myth: a "second-order semiotic system", a symbol that deforms and hollows out the concrete meaning of the thing or things that served to create it. The spellcaster knows nothing of how the diadem was once used for its intended purpose, but he understands that it is a particularly important thing possessing mystical power. At the same time, for his own purposes, he has no need of any accurate information whatsoever about the diadem: he needs only the basic knowledge that will allow him to include it in a magical ritual — that is, in a primitive system of manipulations aimed at extracting practical benefit from communication with supernatural forces. For this purpose, the "trail" of authoritative meanings once assigned to this object, vaguely perceived as numinous but semantically empty, turns out to be more important than the meanings themselves.

The mechanisms by which meanings shift relative to the objects initially associated with them can also be at play in the cultural destinies of places in space, if these places are interpreted symbolically within one, or particularly in several, traditions. S.V. Babkina discusses "palimpsest places", attempting to reconstruct the way mythological content is assigned to one particular palimpsest place. Babkina even outlines the trajectory of a topographical object's "shifts" resulting from transformations of the myth associated with it. The Temple in Jerusalem arises "on the site of a Jebusite sanctuary asso-

ciated with burials” — and the memory of the existence of a certain grave underneath the Temple begins to work to increase the significance of this grave, even bringing it into line with the status of the Temple, which was conceived, along with Jerusalem, as the center of the world. The Temple Mount is transformed into the site where the first man, Adam, was created and buried. But after the destruction of the Temple, and as the topography of Jerusalem is reinterpreted in line with the ideas of a new religion — the religion of the Christians — the sacred locus literally “shifts”. In the minds of members of this new religion the Temple Mount cedes its authority to another mountain: Golgotha, which begins to be perceived not only as the place where Christ was crucified, but also as the burial place of Adam. In this way, the central myth of the new religion, atonement for original sin, acquires its final expression in space.

The site of a place that is considered sacred and given symbolic meaning by tradition can not only shift in space: it can oscillate between a literal, historically real existence and a purely virtual existence in oral tradition and literature. M.G. Seleznev’s article is an example of extraction of the literal meaning from a variety of evidence that it is much easier to think of as what we would now call a literary game than as indications of the existence of a specific geographical reality, the “Jewish sanctuary in the Heliopolis *nome*” on the territory of Ptolemaic Egypt. The author shows how the symbolic geography set down in prophecies from ancient, authoritative Jewish texts is projected onto a physically existing site. This naturalization of sacred geography is supported or, conversely, refuted by editorial and translation strategies derived from various geopolitical ambitions, and one of the verses of the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 19:18) becomes an arena for textological controversy. In a sense, M.M. Yurovitskaya’s work could be thought of as the corollary of M.G. Seleznev’s study. In her commentary on the sixth chapter of Isaiah, Yurovitskaya calls the ancient Greek version of this Biblical text “one of the most inconsistent books of the Septuagint, both in terms of translation technique and at the level of exegesis”. A parallel “slow reading” of the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint shows how provocative the prophecies of Isaiah, filled with expressionistic images but often obscuring their referent (probably intentionally) and sounding too “general”, are both for the translator and for the exegete: given the obvious structural dissimilarity of the two languages, compounded by the deliberately enigmatic vocabulary, even trying to convey the grammatical forms and the simplest syntactic constructions of the original in Greek throws up “translation issues”. Yurovitskaya’s commentary turns out to be a kind of linguistic laboratory which has taken on the task of demonstrating the “explosive” potential of the book of Isaiah from different perspectives, from the strictly linguistic to the theological.

In A.V. Podossinov’s study, the relationship between virtual and real geography is explored in several possible modes, the most widespread modes in ancient literature. A myth is set in a particular space; therefore, a myth needs a geography, and even provides continuations of the spaces known to people experientially through imaginary spaces: “So the idea of the geography of myth <...> can be combined with mythical geography <...>, revealing its mythological meanings”. Utopias (narratives about the Islands of the Blessed, perfect states, alter orbis...) provide a pure example of a mythical space intended as a receptacle of mythological meanings. Myths ascribe meanings to well-known, habitable spaces in the center of the Oikumene, and populate remote

seas and lands with wonders and monsters. However, as territories that were previously considered distant are colonized and rendered habitable, and as the borders of the Oikumene expand, the habitats of mysterious creatures and peoples also “move away” from the center; and the characteristics of geographical sites that were previously barely even imagined, but are now colonized and studied, are transferred to sites located on these new horizons. Sometimes these movements do not go unnoticed in scholarship, and then narratives are written to somehow explain this “mobility of places”. Sometimes we meet several physically existing places that claim to “coincide” with the geographical name familiar to us from the myths. It is noteworthy that, in all three studies of the problems of the symbolism of sites in space, place is secondary to the meaning attributed to it and depends on it, and not the other way around: meaning and content are not derived from place.

The study of the symbolism of space continues with a study of the symbolism of the body. The link here is the *Rig Veda* hymn analyzed by A.M. Dubyanskiy about the sacrifice of Purusha, from whose organs and physiological functions both celestial bodies, parts of outer space, the world's elements, and castes all arise. The author outlines the extremes of Indian culture's attitude to the body: on the one hand, the somatization of the cosmos in the *Rig Veda*, and on the other, the distrust of the body in Jainism and Buddhism, in which the very necessity of bodily existence is interpreted as evidence of spiritual imperfection in previous lives, dooming the body's owner to remain in the inauthentic world of visible phenomena. The semantics of the body and the actions it can perform or undergo are very complex in India's various traditions. Take for example ways of thinking about the act of self-sacrifice that involves donating the body or its parts: the body may be an offering that a Shaivite dedicates to a deity who stands incomparably higher in the cosmic hierarchy than his servant, but it can also be alms, which in Buddhist legends a self-sacrificing ruler, out of noble generosity, bestows on his own subjects, using the gift of the body as a last resort to relieve the suffering of the unfortunate.

A.I. Shmaina-Velikanova's work considers the spiritualization of corporeality in early Christian culture, the symbolic reinterpretation of those bodily functions thanks to which humans' social existence becomes the continuation of human physiology (pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding), and the inclusion of these functions in the theological context. The researcher focuses on the *Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*, an early Christian work which has for several years been a subject of one of the seminars led by her together with Nina Vladimirovna. The main characters in *The Passion* are women, one of whom gives birth to a son on the eve of her arrest, while the other gives birth to a daughter while already in prison, and the text's compiler is clearly interested in the details of the corporeal and emotional life of the young mothers and the reactions of others to what is happening to them. As the story progresses, the tension grows between the heroines' corporeal experiences in “this world” (labor pains, breast-feeding) and the new spiritual truths that it falls to them to discover for themselves. It is quite logical that these truths always find physical expression, starting with Perpetua's baby's refusal of the breast just when her arrest and impending execution mean she can no longer feed him, which does no damage to Perpetua's health, and ending with the ecstasy she experiences when attacked and wounded by a buffalo in the

circus (she does not even notice the injury). The complex, even paradoxical, perception of the body and its suffering in early Christian culture culminates in the scene of the martyrs' death, and particularly in Perpetua's gesture, in which it would be tempting to see the suicide of a young aristocrat in front of a crowd as a manifestation of a patrician ethos that she has not entirely overcome. However, the author of the study convincingly demonstrates just how superficial this interpretation is, and restores the theological meaning of Perpetua's gesture: the gesture of a martyr who does not avoid suffering when going to her death, and does not hide that she is afraid of it and wishes it to be over as soon as possible — just as her Savior, whose death “was not noble”, was afraid of suffering and did not avoid it. It is this kind of death — at the hands of the unworthy, in pain and humiliation — that ensures that the martyr's entire being, and not only the corporeal component of this being, “participates in the sacrifice of Christ”, even if the martyr did not feel her own body's suffering for a long time before the divinely-appointed hour of her death, drawing on all her spiritual power and ability to project her spiritual being beyond the boundaries of earthly existence.

The studies conducted by A.Yu. Vinogradov and D.S. Penskaya of two fifth-century Byzantine texts, the *Life of John the Calybite* and the *Narration of Agapius*, shed light on the changes undergone by the hagiographic narrative that emerged in the early Christian era as late antiquity gave way to the Middle Ages. In such texts, which Nina Vladimirovna characterized as a “by-product” of exegetical practice, any material detail or event in the material world is characterized by ontological incompleteness. Therefore, decipherment becomes the principal strategy for reading them (an exercise that should be not only hermeneutic, but also ascetic): the key must be found to the realia mentioned in the text in order to discover the authoritative meanings associated with them in Christian tradition. Both of the Byzantine texts discussed in this monograph are tales of spiritual journeys. But if the *Narration of Agapius*, which tells of ascent from the life of a hermit to the life of a coenobite, is a pure example of a symbolic narrative that does not contain any “accidental” details or events (i.e. those not endowed with symbolic meaning), then it is no accident that Vinogradov repeatedly tries the genre of “novel” on for size in relation to the *Life of John the Calybite*. In the *Life*, things and characters' actions are very significant in themselves, in their materiality, because they are full to the brim with specific socio-historical content. This reality does “oblige us to compare it [the *Life*. — J. I.], paradoxically enough, with the social novel of the modern age” (p. 396), in which the hero, shaped by historical circumstances, is placed in a situation where he must struggle against them and either perish under their oppression, spiritually and sometimes also physically, or learn to use them to achieve success (which, however, does not exclude spiritual destruction). Indeed, it is the values of social existence that are problematized by the author of the *Life of John the Calybite* in order to show to what extent these values, for all society's approval of them, actually stand in the way of the pursuit of spiritual perfection commanded by Christian teaching, the purpose of which cannot be defined by the “spirit of the times”. The spiritual feat of the main character is to overcome the patterns and norms of behavior and understanding of one's self common to the Byzantine aristocracy of the second half of the fifth century, while the actions and emotions of those characters who are not able to put this feat in the right context and understand its true meaning

are motivated by a commitment to social and psychological automatism imposed by the environment and the era. In the text, this split in the value system correlates with two different aesthetic principles: realistic mimesis and the allegorical narrative that is traditional for hagiography (and exegetical literature in general), elements of which can be read even in the most naturalistic depictions of individual details, everyday actions, and the characters' feelings.

Studies in the field of historical semantics sometimes allow us to conclude that structurally similar processes can occur with units of the most varied levels of language, however far apart they might be from each other: both with a single term that is part of the verbal design of a ritual, and with a basic concept in the language of culture that covers a whole area of social practice. T.A. Mikhailova traces the fate and outlines the field of meanings of a single Irish word that appears to have been borrowed from Latin but then undergone major changes. Turning to the various contexts in which the term occurs allows the researcher to reconstruct not only the word's "dictionary" meaning, but also its pragmatic meaning; to make out "a connotative scheme that can hardly find an exact equivalent at the lexical level but is easily described at the level of the subject" (p. 437). P.N. Lebedev examines the semantic shift that takes place in the first few centuries AD in such an important area of practice as communication with unclean spirits. The researcher examines evidence of exorcism in early Christian texts and reconstructs the ideas expressed in them about humans' power over demonic forces. The practice of exorcising harmful spirits existed in both the pagan and the Jewish environments. Christian culture inserts communication with supernatural forces into a completely new conceptual context but borrows much from previously established ideas and traditional ritual practices. Most likely, there could be no religion in which the methods and aims of communication between representatives of different levels of existence were not a reflection of the religion's overall worldview, proceeding logically from its conceptions of the structure of the universe as a whole. P.N. Lebedev shows that in the Christian worldview, the ability to command spirits is justified not only in terms of hierarchies of existence, but also eschatologically: in the world-historical perspective, demonic forces must be defeated, so to a significant extent, the power that Christians wield over them in the present is a foretaste of the ultimate defeat prepared for them at the end of time. Early Christians' peculiar attitude to time has been noted by many researchers, and it is interesting that the temporal and eschatological emphasis that shifts the meaning of an action performed in the present to the "end of time" arises even in ways of thinking about areas of practice as specific as communication with demonic forces.

A number of this project's studies are devoted to phenomena that might nowadays come under the umbrella of textual pragmatics. Richard Martin expands the field of myth studies by asking how (and for what purposes!) the performative potential of myth is realized in ancient poetic texts: how "Greek myth operates in tandem with ritual to shape and control the human environment." Martin identifies "referential shifts" in terms and combinations of terms often used in early poetry and discovers semantic accentuations that arise when poets use certain grammatical forms and metrical silences or establish unexpected connections between referents by selecting and arranging words in particular ways, especially proper names and epithets for gods

and heroes. Martin's painstaking linguistic analysis reveals the techniques that constitute the performative dimension of a poetic text with mythological content: we begin to understand how a type of speech arises and evolves that, containing a mythological subject or references to realities belonging to the realm of myth, "make things happen, whether through persuasion, commanding, or the strategic deployment of memory" (p. 172). Knowledge of gods and heroes is put together from their mythological genealogies and biographies, which are present in a collapsed form in the epithets used for them and the formulae for addressing them. This knowledge created in ancient poetry has a multifaceted pragmatic meaning. It lays bare the structure of the universe, both physical and ethical, in many of its innermost subtleties, irrevocable oddities, and even paradoxes, and thus conveys not only how to think correctly about the properties of gods and people and understand what exactly, by virtue of these properties, finds favor with people and pleases the gods, but also how to choose the right strategies for communicating with the one and the other.

Ewen Bowie's paper, which follows Martin's research in this book, proves by contradiction that the sphere of existence of this knowledge, a staple of the political world, is official publicity par excellence. Bowie's analysis of surviving seventh – to early fifth-century fragments of Greek poetry performed during private dinners (i.e. for family members and very close friends) shows that they featured mythological narratives only relatively rarely, and when they did, these narratives were most likely tributes to local and family (i.e. private, once again) cults. The social and public nature of myth is also reflected in Lucia Athanassaki's case study, which reconstructs the absolutely unique anthropological character of the statesman who combines great political ambition with a deep fear of his own audience. The Athenian general Nicias, a character in Plutarch and Lucia Athanassaki's subject, is an example of this. According to Athanassaki, he chooses, "he adopted a highly ritualized *modus vivendi*, both in public and in private, that afforded him maximal visibility and *kleos* [glory. — *J. I.*], necessary for a politician, while allowing him to keep his distance from those he so feared" (p. 327). By organizing lavish popular religious festivals with funds from his own coffers and demonstrating his own piety with extravagant sacrifices, the Athenian politician strives to remain within the halo of myth. By flaunting his association with the gods, he seems to remove himself from the "profane" era of political life and make himself invulnerable to potential enemies among his fellow citizens. While he is in his native Athens, his abundant donations make it seem as if he is constantly participating in the rituals of the Delos sanctuary. We could say that Nicias exploits the insurmountable distance between the epic time of myth and his own time: he seems to want to materialize the gap between the two temporalities, to turn it into a chasm between himself and the Athenian people.

The authors of this monograph focus on how the meanings of mythological subjects and images are transformed as myth is appropriated, on the one hand, by philosophy, and on the other, by dramatic genres — both in antiquity and today. In A.V. Lebedev's study, the object undergoing this "semantic movement" is a construction that came into existence in ancient times as a mythologeme and part of a cult and was later assimilated by philosophical systems: the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Lebedev locates the source of this teaching on the Aegean Islands, in the myth-

ological concept of living several lives in different bodies. The researcher traces this idea of the ability of the living, when dying, to be repeatedly reborn in different guises back to that ancient era when the world was still one for archaic man, not divided into the world of the living and the “afterlife”, and when the series of births and deaths undergone by each being was perceived as a natural way for the inexhaustibility and indestructibility of life to be realized (we may recall here the concept of *Unzerstörbarkeit*, which Karl Kerényi used to refer to this same phenomenon and to which he dedicated one of his principal works: *Dionysos: Urbild des unzerstörbaren Lebens*). The eight sections of Lebedev’s voluminous article, which has something of the format of the monograph, are eight episodes in the development of the idea of reincarnation, from the archaic intuition of the infinity of natural life, to several types of religious and philosophical teaching arrived at through rationalization, translation into the language of philosophy, and “historization”: by reading an ethical meaning into a purely mythological construction, combining this construction with ideas about the division of the world into this world and the other world, and composing a “prestigious” fake biography for it, in which it was associated with the names of authoritative mythical or semi-mythical heroes and (supposed) cults from the distant past.

B. Maslov’s article discusses this ethicization of myth and use of the categories of good and evil to interpret the events of a mythological plot as a manifestation of the global semantic shift that made ancient Greek culture unique. This shift consists in the emergence and development of conceptual thinking alongside the preservation of the status of figurative and mythological thinking. Comparing the concept of tragic *ēthos* in Aristotle’s *Poetics* and in the works of Olga Freidenberg, Maslov follows in the Leningrad scholar’s footsteps, tracing the logic she formulated for the metamorphoses that, over the course of the genre’s history, affected the hero of Attic tragedy, its plot, and also — perhaps more importantly — the way tragedies’ authors and audiences understood the world. The conceptual framework for Freidenberg’s book *Image and Concept* is the idea that, in ancient Greek culture, image-based cognition tended to find its expression in numerous scenes of “spectation”, while the conceptual thought that developed later tended to create narratives interested in causality and in characters’ motivations. The nature of tragic *ēthos*, the many layers of which are revealed only through paleontological work, is determined by a combination of these two strategies for creating tragic characters, which, from the point of view of their genesis, belong to different phases in the history of Greek thought. Consequently, the main character of the tragedy is endowed with the qualities both of a passive victim who undergoes suffering and death in front of the audience, and of an active hero who claims to control the course of events (but never actually does).

The problem raised in Freidenberg’s works and returned to by Maslov is projected into the modern day in T.F. Teperik’s article on ancient plots in films from the second half of the 20th and the 21st century. In Teperik’s study, the genre of the peplum (the “sword-and-sandals film”) becomes a laboratory for identifying ways of reworking the plots and characters of ancient Greek myths and literature in line with the capabilities of cinema and audience expectations. Considering numerous examples of cinematic reinterpretation of the vicissitudes of the Trojan War, Odysseus’ travels, and the characters of the various participants in these narratives, Teperik convincingly shows that

the reinterpretation of these mythological events and characters through use of the various symbolic languages of cinema and by giving mythical heroes modern-day psychologies is in fact nothing more than a continuation of the ways of working with them that ancient authors successfully employed. Modern-day directors exploit properties of mythological narratives and mythic heroes that were already familiar to ancient poets: variability of plot and polyvalence of persona, and the ability of characters to “fit” into different psychological profiles, sometimes diametrically opposed to each other.

One of the cross-cutting themes of Nina Vladimirovna’s research was the relationship between word and image: the visual aspects of thinking about plot, and the way narrative unfolds from ekphrasis. In the present monograph, these relationships are investigated in several modes. N.N. Kazansky’s work discusses a historical reality as the source for an image (of a combat technique), on the one hand, and a hypothetical genre of literature (the extolling of *aristeiae*) that later merged into the epic narrative, on the other. E.V. Aleksandrova’s article examines how the ritual word and the ritual image close in on each other due to the common pragmatic function that cements their connection. I.G. Matyushina’s study concerns a verbal description of a non-existent image, the visual potential of which is exploited as a reservoir of means of verbal expression. Finally, T.Al. Mikhailova’s essay tackles an archaic archetype that syncretically combines the verbal and the visual. This archetype is able to break through images and plots that have suppressed the memory of it, but nevertheless owe their origin to it, inverting the distribution of roles that cultural tradition has determined for them.

Taking as her starting point a comparison of the image of the battle scene on the Pylos Agate (mid-15th century BC) with one of the episodes of the Iliad that has most frequently attracted the attention of researchers (the battle between Paris and Menelaus, which comes to an unexpected end when Aphrodite intervenes to protect the Trojan), N.N. Kazansky offers an example of the reconstruction of the historical, cultural, linguistic, and literary contexts present in miniature in the famous episode of single combat between the two husbands of Helen. Kazansky points to a historical reality that goes back to both the image on the Pylos seal and a fragment of the Homeric text: a combat technique that allowed a warrior armed with only a sword and with no defensive weapons to defeat a fully-equipped opponent. There was presumably an ancient poetic description of the battle that culminated in this technique. In the version we know, the description of the duel is truncated and subordinated to the general plot; and the more aspects of it are pointed out, yet devoid of motivation and not deemed worthy of explanation, the more confusing and contradictory it seems to us, and seemed even to ancient commentators. In order to achieve a satisfactory understanding of the text describing the duel, Kazansky takes his investigation in several directions at once, examining how various strands complement and clarify each other: archaeology of things, historical reconstruction of the actions performed with them, and linguistic reconstruction of the narrative describing these actions and things. “The epic sometimes preserves ancient details, blithely combining them with later plots, or, on the contrary, placing later details in an ancient plot”, but the *rudimentary motif* (a term first used by F.F. Zelinsky) of single combat between warriors with different weapons and levels of protection, and the whole ancient genre proposed by Kazansky of the extolling of *aristeiae*, the memory of which is preserved by a fragment of the

Iliad, are not just used as linguistic building blocks, a reservoir of vocabulary and verbal formulas for a new narrative. They are subject to psychological and ethical reinterpretation, and reinforce the effect of the unexpected twist in the tale of the duel between the deceived spouse and his happy rival.

In the case of the epitaph and ekphrasis that are the subject of the articles by E.V. Alexandrova and I.G. Matyushina, we once again enter into the game of embodiment and disembodiment of meaning, the reification of semantics and the creation of things through language: the funeral hall of an Egyptian nobleman speaks to us more eloquently than any text, and a text by the Greek sophist Philostratus generates such a lifelike illusion of the object it describes that generations of researchers were misled by it. Above, we saw how, by becoming dematerialized and dehistoricized, a real thing (a diadem) turns into a magical, purely verbal, artifact. The same fate befalls the thing in the epigram: when the epigram becomes a literary genre, its original connection with the real thing is blurred and lost. The same goes for ekphrasis: Philostratus' "images" were, most likely, a literary fiction, and Cebes' "image" undoubtedly was. There was no shield of Achilles or shield of Hercules — and the Viking shields to which the skaldic "shield poems" are dedicated may not have existed either. The papers by E.V. Alexandrova and I.G. Matyushina, devoted to ancient Egyptian tombs and medieval skaldic poetry respectively, reveal aspects of the relationship between text and image that never made an appearance in the Greek tradition and its European daughter traditions. In a sense, Egyptian burial texts are the antithesis of Greek epitaphs. If the latter, calling out to the reader (*siste, viator!*), involving him in a dialogue and making him a character in this dialogue, moves out of the sphere of ritual towards the profane human world, as Nina Vladimirovna notes, then the function of Egyptian tomb inscriptions is the opposite: to involve the reader in the rite, to open for him the door to the other world (that door was even depicted right there in the tomb's chapels). The reader of the Egyptian texts becomes a priest himself: he is called upon not to admire the beauty of the monument, like a Greek (*ἦ καλὸν τὸ μνημα!*), nor to enter into dialogue with it, nor to reflect on the glory (*δόξα*) of the deceased, but to "proclaim the sacrifices", engaging in ritual worship and sacrifice. The very words that this reader is called upon to utter are a votive gift: these words, as we know from Egyptian texts, could replace beer and bread as a sacrifice to the dead. Another significant difference between the Greek epitaph and the Egyptian tomb inscriptions is in the possibilities for combining text and image that hieroglyphics could provide and Greek writing could not: thanks to the iconism of hieroglyphics, for example, the determinative could become an independent pictorial composition, and a first-person pronoun an image of a nobleman in a chair holding a *medu* staff in his hand. Thus, what we see here is not the emancipation of meaning from image or folklore (or literature) from ritual, as in Greece, but rather the opposite process, despite the fact that the morphology of the Greek epitaph and the Egyptian tomb inscriptions is generally identical: in both cases, we see the deceased replaced by a symbolic construct, prosopopoeia of the thing, and apostrophe to the viewer/reader. I recall Heraclitus' saying: the way up and the way down are one and the same.

If materiality in the Egyptian burial texts is visible, visual, monumental, then in the skaldic ekphrasis to which I.G. Matyushina devotes her article, it is an epiphenom-

enon of rhetorical and poetic skill. Unlike in ancient ekphrasis, the connection between a particular thing (a shield, or the wall panels mentioned in the *Saga of the People of Salmon River Valley*) and the scattering of highly sophisticated kennings that serve to tell of it, as well as the mythological plots that these kennings contain in miniature, turns out to be exclusively external. Shield poetry is composed in connection with the gifting of a shield, but does not represent, as far as we can tell, ekphrasis of the subjects depicted on the shield. The only counterexample is the 12th-century *Orkneyinga Saga*, a poetic contest between Rögnvald Kali and Oddi the Small, but this work may have been influenced by European scholasticism. Thus, “skaldic ekphrasis”, shield poetry, is not so much ekphrasis as an element of poetics, a kind of “treasure trove of kennings”; it is no accident that it has come down to us as an aspect of poetics, in the third part of Snorri Sturluson’s *Younger Edda*, called “The Language of Poetry” (Skáldskaparmál). Here, an apparent convergence — the independent birth of ekphrasis in the literature of antiquity and in Norse poetry — is, in this case, only an illusion of similarity.

The paradox in the relationship between the image and the word is demonstrated by one of the final articles in this monograph, T.A.I. Mikhailova’s study of the embodiments in painting of the subject of Judith, who cuts off the head of Holofernes and triumphantly carries it away from the enemy camp. The researcher reconstructs the history of the subject of the enemy’s severed head in European painting and notes the most paradoxical of its constituent events. Emancipated from the text of the Bible book, the plot containing the scene in which the severed head of the enemy (enemy/lover) is demonstrated or contemplated undergoes significant semantic transformations. Its participants can be replaced by figures who are antonymic to the characters of the Bible book. Thus, the iconography of the righteous Judith with the head of the unholy Holofernes can blend into the iconography of the unholy Salome (Herodias) with the head of the righteous John the Baptist on a platter, or with the monstrous “cephaloscopy”: the contemplation of the severed head of the enemy alongside foodstuffs that appear to be served as a side dish to the head (Fulvia with the head of Cicero). Finally, the plot itself can become its own mirror image when the actors change roles: a modern artist paints Holofernes reveling in the contemplation of a woman’s severed head on a platter. In Mikhailova’s view, this reconnaissance was possible because “the artistic consciousness was able to see past the historical barriers to a deeper, more ancient mythological layer, a trace of the archetype present here”. All the variations of the subject of the severed head are “particular manifestations of a single mythologeme”. However far apart Herodias and Judith may be, the distance between them is hardly greater than that between the Sumerian Enki and Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

Just as the peoples of antiquity believed that the outskirts of the Oikumene were the home of monsters and the site of all sorts of wonders, at the gateway leading out of our monograph is a triad of “teratological” essays. The first of them, by S.Yu. Neklyudov, is devoted to the mythologeme of the yeti, which is considered using the tools of modern folklore studies. The case of the yeti enables Neklyudov to show that archaic mythology and pseudoscience (cryptozoology, hominidology) are natural bedfellows — and to demonstrate how mythology, when faced with scientific or journalistic discourse, successfully mimics them. The anthropozoomorphism of this character, his existence on the border of the human world and the wilderness (he lives not in the epic past or the

otherworldly “lower world”, but somewhere in “our world”, in forests, caves, etc.) make the yeti surprisingly similar to perfectly real, although extinct, hominids: this is a curious case of convergence not between different mythologies, but between mythology and evolutionary biology. However, the border inhabited by the characters of “lower mythology” can run not only between the human world and the natural world: it can also be located within the social order. J.V. Ivanova and P.V. Sokolov’s essay is dedicated to an example of this. At the crossroads where three borders meet — chronological (between history and prehistory), epistemic (between enlightened science and popular belief), and sociopolitical (between patricians and plebeians, or the Neapolitan aristocracy and the *lazzaroni*) — we meet the figure of the witch, who became a “mainstream” target of scientific polemics in 17th- and 18th-century Europe. In the Italian intellectual culture of the Early Modern period, the figure of the witch reveals an unexpected kinship, on the one hand, with archaic forms of pre-state and pre-class political relations, and on the other, with the theoretical constructs of man that were being developed in the political philosophy of the time (the “Hobbesian man”; later Rousseau’s “savages”).

Two essays that Bakhtin might rightfully consider to belong to the genre of the Menippean satire close the part of this book devoted to research: refined concepts with deep roots in the rich history of the Platonic tradition are tested for strength, turning up in jocoserious contexts. The divine essence of sneezing, its providential, mantic meaning and, at the same time, the incorporation of sneezing into a system of physiological and mental acts — the complicated relationships between these aspects of this, at first and rather superficial sight, ordinary and arbitrary act are the subject of P.G. Elchenko’s study. The scholar addresses one Late Antique interpretation of a fragment from Plato’s *Phaedo* and suggests potential responses to the question of why the author of this interpretation, Olimpiodorus the Younger of the Alexandrian Platonic school (6th century A.D.), paradoxically and unexpectedly brings together sneezing and inspiration. I.A. Protopopova’s essay is a philosophical experiment that may shock the reader, for its author convincingly extracts from a well-known fairy tale some of the commonplaces of the Platonic tradition, and ultimately demonstrates the topological (as Yuri Lotman used the word) similarity between literary genres and forms of thinking that have not traditionally been associated with each other. Before our eyes, the author returns a sophisticated philosopheme and myth, one of the most refined genres of literature, to folklore, leading us to doubt the connection of meaning with concrete historical circumstance, and even more so its rootedness in them.

The history of classical scholarship was a major focus of Nina Vladimirovna’s academic work from the very beginning of her career. She published works by V.I. Ivanov and Ya.E. Golosovker, but for her, the most important figure in the history of classical studies, not just in Russia but worldwide, and indeed the greatest theorist of the humanities, was and remains Olga Mikhailovna Freidenberg (1890–1955), the philologist and classicist, literary historian and philosopher of culture whom many of our authors see as the originator of the research method that unites them. It was Nina Vladimirovna who spearheaded the O.M. Freidenberg Electronic Archive project (www.freidenberg.ru) in 2008, which made many works available to the general public that had only once seen the light of day, almost a century ago, in limited editions that had since become bibliographical rarities.

Nina Vladimirovna discusses the events associated with the opening of the archive in the early 1970s, and her participation in them, in her article “I Have not a Life, but a Biography”, an essay on Freidenberg’s academic fate, containing the highest assessment of her place in the history of Russian and world scholarship on classical antiquity and the philosophy of culture in general. As she outlines the milestones of Freidenberg’s biography, Nina Vladimirovna considers what meanings might be implied in the *longue durée* by the connection, established by her own scholarly effort of will, between the lives of two academics: the Stalin-era classicist and the continuer of her work, her early 21st-century reader and biographer. It therefore seems perfectly logical that our introductory section, intended to help the reader navigate the main content of the book, should include an article by N.Yu. Kostenko. Kostenko is Nina Vladimirovna’s colleague and assistant, and the permanent curator of the ever-evolving O.M. Freidenberg Electronic Archive. In her essay on archival documents from one of the most difficult periods in Freidenberg’s life, Kostenko perceives her biography in the same, tragic, mode in which Nina Vladimirovna has repeatedly spoken of it, and chooses for her research what was undoubtedly one of the most difficult periods of Freidenberg’s life. At the end of this monograph, readers will find an exhaustive bibliography of Nina Vladimirovna’s works, compiled by Kostenko and systematized with the help of their author. Kostenko appears in different guises at the beginning and end of this book, yet with the same ultimate goal. At the beginning of the book, she plays the role of historian and archivist, who brings previously unknown documents into academic circulation and thereby discovers new things, elaborates on things already known, and enables what once seemed self-evident to be revised; at the end, she is a bibliographer, who hunts down and assembles everything that has already come to light at various times and in various places, bringing order to the disparate results of many scholars’ work or, as is the case in our book, compiling the academic biography of a single scholar from their published works. The archivist may work with the past and the bibliographer with the present, but both transform a chaotic multiplicity of evidence into a totality of facts ready to take their place in the history of scholarship.

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