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Myths, Images, and the Typology of Identities in Early Greek Art

1. Identity: Problems with a modern concept in present times and in the past

'Identity', in its double sense as an individual and a collective concept, has since the 1970es become a key term of discourse on historical as well as contemporary societies. The notion of 'identity' is not only used as a descriptive category of historical and sociological analysis but is also, and above all, asserted as a legitimate claim of individual and collective entities: Individual persons as well as social groups or national populations claim the right to live according to, and to fight for their identity. In the context of this conference, it is the aspect of collective identity I am going to focus on.

Nobody will deny the importance of the concept of collective identity: Communities cannot exist without a conscious or unconscious definition of what they are. That is how they can identify themselves. Nor will anybody on principle contest the right of communities to cultivate and defend their identity: We concede this right to the Greeks in their fight against the Persians as well as to contemporary peoples that are suppressed by superpowers or threatened by foreign enemies. But on the other hand, it is also evident that such emphasis on identity is anything but innocent. For there can be no doubt that during the last generation the increasing assertion of collective and national identity has produced an enormous potential of conflicts throughout the world. And the same is true of classical Athens and republican Rome. In this sense, the German historian Lutz Niethammer has subjected the term and the notion of 'collective identity' to an overall critical examination (*Kollektive Identität. Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur*. Reinbeck bei Hamburg 2000).

In general, the notion of collective identity involves two highly problematic and dangerous features. Firstly, the emphatic search for and insistence on collective identity by social groups or 'national' entities testifies to a high degree of self-centeredness that tends to ignore or destroy the identity of other entities. Identity is difficult to socialize. Secondly, identity is a highly conservative concept. For identity manifests itself in how an entity has come into existence, how it persevered through the ages, how it stuck to its own values and thereby stayed 'identical' with itself. In this sense, the notion of identity becomes a sort of sacred dogma which is based not so much on reason and insight but on the affective

values of descent and heritage: a habitual self-righteousness that cannot be called into question. The dangers of irrationality are evident.

These problems become even more urgent when 'political identity' is consciously founded on the memory of its own specific past. Common memory is highly exclusive: it excludes all those who do not – and even worse: who cannot – share the same memories. The memory of the Nibelungs can be adopted and cultivated only by native Germans, the Rütli oath can be commemorated only by Swiss, the French and the American Revolution only by French and Americans. A much more reasonable concept would found communities not on exclusive pasts but on common values which are open to all those who accept them through insight and free choice.

It is probably not by chance that the concept of "cultural memory", i. e. the reference to an exclusive "Western" past, is so successful in our period of conservative self-reflection. However, I am not convinced that in our own time it is a healthy device to found collective 'identities' on the basis of a set of pre-fixed memories and to stick faithfully to the values incorporated in these memories just because of their age-old authority. Of course, recent research has shown that collective memory is anything but a stable set of generally accepted facts and notions: memory is a flexible instrument in the service of changing historical positions and tendencies. But this is a conclusion from a meta-historical standpoint: For the implicit *tendency* or explicit *intention* of historical entities in founding their collective identity on collective memories is to create for themselves an enduring exclusive stability. It is with this critical view that I am going to approach some basic aspects of creating collective identity through the memory of a mythical heroic past in early Greece.

(Wolf Biermann: "Nur wer sich ändert, bleibt sich treu")

2. Categories of 'mythological identity'

The creation of collective identity through myths is effectuated by establishing a meaningful relation between the mythical past and the present time of actual societies. More precisely, this is an act of 'identification' between an actual person or community of the present on the one side and specific persons and events of the mythical past on the other. Through this act the actual person or community derives its own 'identity' from its mythical model and shapes it in this sense: it becomes to some degree 'identical' with its mythical model and through this 'identity' with itself.

However, this relation between present-day societies and the mythical past is anything but a static dependence on a prefixed mythical tradition. Greek communities, entire poleis as well as the social groups therein, changed their character, and by implication their 'identity', dramatically from one generation to the other. Consequently, each generation, as a whole as well as in its sub-divisions, created new versions of mythological 'identification': either by selecting new 'model myths' or by inventing new versions of traditional myths. Thus, the actual present and the mythical past are interfering with each other through some kind of reciprocal dynamics: Explicitly, the present society conceives and shapes its identity according to the model of myth; but by implication, the mythical model is adapted to the changing structure and values of the present-day society – in order to become an authoritative prefiguration of this society's features and ideals.

The construction of 'identity' between myths and the present is achieved along three basic lines, the distinction of which seems to be crucial for a proper understanding of the relevant strategies and phenomena.

Genealogical identity means a legitimizing reference to great ancestors. This category comprises two aspects. On the one hand, there is individual physical descent: The Peisistratids derived their origins from Neleus, the kings of Sparta as well as those of Macedonia from Herakles. On the other hand, there is the extraction from 'corporate ancestors': The Athenians traced their common origins back to their mythical kings Kekrops and Erechtheus, the Romans to their founder-king Romulus. From such genealogical origins, individuals and communities derived their specific claims of prestige and predominance.

Local identity means a venerating reference to figures of myth of specific places or regions. Thus, Agamemnon was venerated in Argos, Menelaos and Helen in Sparta where the Dorian invaders had cut off all genealogical lineages. Likewise, Oidipous was worshipped in Athens while his descendants in Thebes had been extinguished long before. These heroes could arouse veneration and even identity because of the power they exerted in their specific local sphere.

Paradigmatic identity means the collective acknowledgement of mythical heroes incorporating specific values or models of behaviour that are valid in a specific community and are considered essential for its identity. Such ideal models are on principle independent of direct succession, either genealogical or local. Thus, Herakles was adopted as an individual model of physical, military or ethical virtue by many monarchs and generals without any genealogical or local relation. Correspondingly, hellenistic Pergamon founded its collective political identity on the succession of classical Athens, although it had not been founded by Athens and

therefore had no specific claim whatsoever to be a 'physical' daughter of the great metropolis. These are purely ideal or ideological models, working as paradigmatic examples.

A common feature of genealogical and local traditions consists in the fact that they cannot be transferred to or adopted by any individual person or collective entity. All those who did not descend from a specific hero or live in this heroes' specific realm could not make any genealogical or local claim on him. Conversely, paradigmatic models are accessible to all those who are ready or willing to identify themselves with the values represented by them.

In general, genealogical, local and paradigmatic identities are not to be adopted as exclusively distinct categories. Often genealogical ancestors are at the same time local heroes; both types may also become paradigmatic models. Nevertheless, in the sense of Weberian 'Idealtypen' the distinction seems to be useful.

Genealogical as well as local identity serves to legitimize privileges as a hereditary property that is transmitted from the ancestors or predecessors and is legitimately inherited by descendants or successors. Genealogical myths are efficient means for claims to an individual's rank and privileges as well as to a community's predominance and power. In genealogical arguments the aspect of the claimant's own qualification becomes secondary in comparison with his / her predetermined hereditary excellence.

Local myths and heroes, on the other hand, become forceful factors for aetiological foundations of rituals and institutions of religion and politics. Moreover, local heroes convey within their sphere of influence power and protection.

Paradigmatic identity, on the contrary, puts values, qualities and achievements to the fore. The glory of the Greek heroes of the Trojan War became a model of ideal identification for all those who dared to compare their own achievements with them. There were no other connections that created 'identity' between myth and the present except for achievements and values as such.

The analytic power of these categories can be proved in some critical situations of history in which a revealing shift was made from one to another of these strategies of creating identity. Particularly striking is the case of Roman generals of the Late Republic referring to Venus as their great tutelary goddess. Sulla as well as Pompey venerated her as the divine guarantor of *felicitas*, that is as a representative of a general ideological concept. Julius Caesar, however, outdid all his predecessors and rivals by claiming Venus as his personal ancestress. Here, the genealogical strategy served to establish an individual statesman's monopoly of a hitherto generally adopted ideology of *felicitas*. Pompey must have been well

aware of his rival's superior claim as becomes evident from his nightmare that he was adorning the temple of Caesar's Venus.

On the other hand, the efficiency of mythological strategies depended highly on actual political power. When Sulla besieged Athens and the Athenian embassies asked him to spare the city from violent conquest by evoking the great past of Theseus, Eumolpos and the Persian Wars, he just replied: "Go off, good men, and take your speeches with you; for I was not sent by the Romans to Athens for love of learning but to subdue its rebels".

3. Private luxury vessels and public architecture in archaic Greece: a world of paradigmatic identity

The prehistory of myths in Neolithic and Bronze age Greece is a matter of much speculation, and nobody can guess whether and in which sense they served to create social and cultural identity. However, a new and emphatic interest in myths, old and new, which originated in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., obviously goes together with the contemporary emergence of basically new social, political and cultural patterns. As is well known, within this period the great past of myths is re-created in three different fields: the epic poetry of Homer and his fellow-bards; images on various products for the elite's heydays of life and death, and cults at revived Bronze age tombs, obviously considered to be burial-places of powerful heroes of the great past.

For this greatly increasing importance of myths various explanations have been given. A still influential view, recently revived by Jan Assmann, sees the work of Homer, the Iliad and the Odyssey, at the origins of Greek culture as it got its shape in the early archaic period: an authoritative book (or two) that created, contained and propagated those traditions of collective memory on which Greek 'identity' was founded throughout antiquity. This view is open to several objections. Firstly, the impact of the Iliad and the Odyssey on early Greek art is not very significant: of all representations of myths down to ca. 600 B.C. at best 10 % deal with subjects from these two poems, and even in these cases there are good reasons for assuming that it was not the authority of Homer that caused the popularity of these topics. The function of a 'founding book' seems rather to apply to – and to be conceived after the model of – Israel, whereas early Greek societies are characterised by a significant lack of powerful acknowledged authorities, whether political, religious or cultural. Probably, then, Homer's role as a primordial founder of Greek culture was conceived not earlier than the 5th century B.C.

My aim in the following considerations is not to give an overall explanation of early Greek myth-making but to focus on images in the visual arts. The question will be

in how far and in which sense these images can be understood as testimonies of identities: of self-conceptualizations of various communities and social groups, changing through time and space. My basic assumption in doing this is that these images must have played their specific role in the societies of the originating poleis of the 8th to 7th centuries, of the developed citizen poleis of the 6th century, and of the politicized poleis of the 5th century B.C. In this context one of the crucial questions will be whether the 'identities' created in different genres of images, that is for different social situations, are identical or differ from one another.

The period of the early polis (late 8th through 7th century B.C.). The structure of the world, as it was experienced in the early phase of archaic Greece can be schematically described in two conceptual circles. An inner circle comprised the world of the emerging polis, with a central settlement and its territory of arable land, while an outer circle included the entire world of civilized peoples, on principle coinciding with the world of Greek poleis. Both of these realms were surrounded by a liminal zone of threatening wilderness which was conceived in conceptual opposition to the order that had been established within the single polis on the one hand and within the entire realm of human / Greek civilization on the other: The polis was encircled by uncultivated woods and mountains, full of wild beasts, while the world of civilized men was surrounded by a zone that was conceived as a dreadful 'end of the world', where the reliable laws of civilization and nature were no longer valid. This twofold, concentric structure of the opposition between civilization and nature is at the basis of images of Greek myths in their initial phase from the late 8th through the 7th century B.C.

The most important general theme of these images concerns heroes combating terrible wild beasts and dreadful monsters. These combats are located precisely in those liminal zones that constitute the structure of civilized human order. Herakles, in his first six labours, fights at the margins against beasts and creatures in the wilderness surrounding the poleis of the Peloponnesos, the core region of Greek civilisation: the Nemean lion which is reported to have threatened the herds and travellers; the Hydra which hindered the access to the fountain of Lerna; the boar of Mount Erymanthos and the hind of Kerynai which devastated the fields; and the Centaurs who by their bestial lust threatened two basic institutions of Greek societies: by disturbing the banquet of Herakles in the cave of Pholos, and by attacking his bride Deianeira. Here, the crucial elements of early Greek poleis are at stake: herds and fields, potable water, travel routes, and moreover the institutionalized communication between male hosts and guests, and between men and women. These threats to the polis community are in part literally, in part conceptually located in the surrounding wilderness where Herakles defends the island of human civilization.

The outer zone surrounding the order of the whole of civilized mankind is a favourite topic of numerous myths in the art of this period. Great heroes advance to the end of the world where they have to face the most horrible monsters. Herakles is sent to the far west, to the island of Erytheia, located in or beyond the ocean, where he has to fight the three-bodied Geryon in order to get his famous herd of cattle which is guarded by the dreadful hound Orthros, a brother of the hellhound Kerberos. Perseus has to make his way to remote wilderness where he kills the Gorgon, cutting off her petrifying mask-like head. Jason conducts his expedition to Kolchis, in the far East, where the sun rises, in order to win the Golden fleece, guarded by a terrible dragon. Bellerophon is sent to the far-off mountains of Lycia in order to defeat the monster Chimaira, composed of a lion, a ram and a snake. Last but not least Odysseus with his companions is exposed in a remote fantasy land to the cannibal Polyphemus. Obviously, these myths are transformations of those experiences, fantasies and fears that the seafarers, merchants and pirates of this period faced in their daring enterprises. Closer interpretation would show that in these images are brought to the fore some central values of Greek self-conceptualization, such as technical skill, inventiveness and cleverness in critical situations, and not least the favour of the gods.

Thus, both of these general themes of early myth representation are conceptualizations of communities: that of the polis, and that of civilised / Greek mankind. In the light of the categories discussed earlier in this paper, it is a striking feature of these images that genealogical criteria seem to play no essential role at all. Herakles is a favourite hero all over Greece; the same is true of Odysseus who is known in Athens, Argos, Samos, and Caere. Even the specifically Corinthian hero Bellerophon does not appear more frequently in Corinth than in Athens, Naxos, and other places. The significance of all these images is purely paradigmatic: They do not create any identity of a specific city but convey a general identity of belonging to an ideal polis community or to the entire community of civilized men.

One may ask whether this is due to the specific functions of the objects decorated with such themes. Indeed, most of them belong to social situations of collective and inclusive character. Painted vessels were used for symposia or funeral rites, while votive offerings were dedicated during public festivals: These are situations of collective and inclusive character in which specific genealogical claims of single families were out of place, while for collective claims of the whole community there was no addressee. Unfortunately, there is no possibility of corroborating this explanation since in his period there are no other genres of

visual art the function of which would motivate an essentially different mode of creating identity.

Private art and public monuments in the period of the developed archaic polis (6th century B.C.). The early 6th century B.C. is throughout Greece a period of a significant consolidation and condensation of great comprehensive communities. At the roots of this process there is, as is well known, the rise of broader middle class groups to power and influence. This phenomenon of increasing condensation is again located on two levels: on the one hand in polis communities, the power of which is evident in collective enterprises like monumental temples and public buildings, common meeting places, or the reorganization of religious city festivals like the Athenian Panathenaia; on the other hand in the all-Greek community of the inter-polis elite class which finds its expression in common military campaigns like the First Sacred War for Delphi or the foundation of panhellenic festivals at Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea between 582 and 573 B.C. Both of these communities were prefigured in contemporary representations of myths.

The chief witness is the François krater. In the upper register the youths and maiden of mythical Athens, rescued by Theseus from the threat of the Minotaur, are united in a ritual dance. Their inscribed names identify them as representatives of all parts of Attica: Hippodameia and Menestho from Athens, Koronis from East Attika, Daduchos from Eleusis, and so forth. The mythical group of young Athenians, united in a religious ritual, constitutes the model of the archaic community of Attika, as it had been “brought together” by the reforms of Solon. Below this scene, the battle of the Lapiths, assisted by the Athenian hero Theseus, against the Centaurs demonstrates the unanimous coherence of a ‘political’ community in warfare. This corresponds closely to the new unanimity of the Athenian military elite, fond of its hoplite armour, as it was created in the time of Solon.

In opposition to these ‘political’ entities, a panhellenic community of mythical heroes cooperates under the leadership of Meleager in hunting the Calydonian boar: Peleus and Admetos from Thessaly, Kastor and Polydeukes from Sparta, and so on. Such were the inter-polis communities which in this period began to unite for common military campaigns like the First Sacred War. Moreover, this panhellenic aspect is emphasised by a fourth frieze representing the funerary games for Patroklos, organized by Achilleus, in which heroes from all parts of Greece were again engaged. This is a precise anticipation of those all-Greek games which were institutionalized for the inter-polis aristocracy in exactly these years.

Taken together, these four scenes add up to a comprehensive and almost systematic panel of coherent communities, as they developed in Athens and elsewhere during the 1st half of the 6th century B.C. in various sectors of social life: religion, warfare, hunting and games, in the frame of the polis and in the wider horizon of the entire Greek world.

As in early archaic art, this is a widely diffused phenomenon in vase painting of this period. A certain new aspect of the François krater is a slight emphasis on Athenian myths, evident in the youths and maiden led by Theseus, and in the same hero's participation in the Lapiths' fight against the Centaurs. However, these Athenian accents are integrated into a wide panorama of myths from all parts of Greece; therefore, local identity is still without great relevance.

Beside such examples of 'private' banquet equipment, the 6th century B.C. allows comparison with images decorating public architecture: above all seen in the polis treasuries at Delphi. Here we might expect an expression of more explicit and exclusive political identity. This expectation, however, is not fulfilled by contemporary examples.

The series of metopes, of about 560 B.C., attributed by most scholars to a treasury of Sikyon, combines various myths which are not united by any common provenience whatsoever. Instead, they are manifestly stamped by paradigmatic concepts. The metope with the Calydonian boar, supplemented by other metopes representing groups of hunters, corresponds closely to the collective hunting scene on the François krater. Equally panhellenic is the character of Jason's expedition to Kolchis with the ship Argo: This myth also unites heroes from all parts of the Greek world and thus becomes a mythical prototype of common maritime enterprises to far off destinations. On the other hand, an impressive metope depicts the Dioscuri Kastor and Polydeukes together with the Apharetids Idas and Lynkeus, stealing a herd of cattle. Here, the emphasis is laid on the unanimous cooperation of glorious heroes in an act of robbery which in archaic times was still considered a demonstration of daring prowess. Complementary to these assertions of manly virtues, another metope represents Europa carried off by Zeus in the guise of a bull. This myth is obviously to be understood as a mythical projection of the institution of marriage which in early Greece was conceived as a violent abduction of the bride by the bridegroom – in this case the most powerful bridegroom, incorporating the strongest forces of virility.

The preserved metopes of the 'Sikyonian' treasury are just a part of the original set and therefore do not add up to a complete and coherent 'program'. Yet, generally, it is obvious that this mythical panorama does not create any specific, genealogical or local, identity of a specific polis; the values conveyed through

these myths are paradigmatic in the sense that they constitute ideal models of behaviour and achievements in the frame of basic structures and situations of archaic Greek societies. The same general focus is to be recognized one generation later in the treasury of Siphnos at Delphi: Here too, the combat of Achilles and Memnon with the assembly of the gods, the battle of the gods against the giants, the judgement of Paris and perhaps the abduction of the Leukippids by the Dioskuri, is full of paradigmatic meaning which is valid within the entire Greek world.

Nevertheless, this *is* identity. The city that erected this precious building, whether it was Sikyon or another ambitious polis, identified itself with these myths and the values they conveyed. If asked, they would have said, yes, this is what we stand for. It did not matter that in this they were not unique, and that other cities identified themselves with the same or similar myths and values. Identity is not necessarily individual, nor exclusive. The remarkable feature of this phenomenon is that even on the panhellenic stage of Delphi where the great cities competed for glory and prestige, they did not aim at distinguishing themselves by unique and exclusive local or genealogical profiles but presented themselves as representatives, perhaps as particularly forceful protagonists of widely recognized collective values.

An interesting case in this respect is the policy of the tyrant Kleisthenes of Sikyon regarding the Homeric poems. During a conflict with Argos he excluded the rhapsodes from all public festivals since, by performing the works of Homer, they glorified mainly the heroes of the enemy neighbour city. For the same reasons, he aimed to expel the Argive hero Adrastos who received heroic cult in a temple in the Agora of Sikyon. The enemy city, therefore, was considered to possess a specific identity derived from local or genealogical heroes of myth. Interestingly, however, Kleisthenes did not think of replacing Adrastos by a hero from Sikyon, but transferred the cult of the hero Melanippos from Thebes to his own city. The reason for this was that in Mythical times Melanippos had been a furious enemy of Adrastos and therefore was expected to be an efficient mythical protagonist in the expulsion of the hated Argive intruder. Thus, the concept of a specific mythical identity based on specific local heroes was adopted only regarding the enemy – but as soon as a proper Sikyonian hero was to be established, this hero was chosen from abroad, as a paradigmatic model of forceful fighting against the Argive foe.

4. Public monuments and private pottery in classical Greece: the conflict-generating character of political identity

A new level of potentially aggressive identity was reached in the polis monuments of classical Athens. At the core of this development there was the strife of Athens for a position of hegemony within the world of Greek city-states. For this purpose, various devices of political self-assertion were developed, among which mythology and public monuments were decisive elements.

In the realm of myth, first of all a new hero was brought to the fore: Theseus. In archaic times the favourite heroes of public and private art, among them Theseus, were chosen regardless of their provenience. Yet, towards the end of the 6th century, in Kleisthenic Athens, Theseus was emphatically re-created as a patriotic hero of Athens, conveying a marked local and genealogical identity.

Theseus' youthful achievements, through which he became equal to Herakles, were conceived as a glorious travel sequence to his mother-city, and his further exploits were actions of a founder hero of the Athenian state. All genres of art were taken into service for propagating this hero of patriotic identity. As a narrative medium, describing the sequence of the hero's deeds, a poem 'Theseis' has been conjectured. On vases, beginning from the last decade of the century, a sequence of these deeds is displayed. Most important, the Athenian treasury at Delphi, which was probably erected after the battle of Marathon, was decorated with a series of metopes which on the better visible south and east facades described the exploits of Theseus while the less visible north and west sides showed the equivalent deeds of Herakles. Moreover, Theseus was distinguished by the presence of Athena, his tutelary goddess who was at the same time the city goddess of Athens.

This well-known series of Theseus metopes are stamped by two devices which need to be emphasized in this context. Firstly, Theseus is a local and genealogical hero. Secondly, Athena as a representative of the city of Athens is a new element in this panhellenic sanctuary. All earlier votive offerings had been destined to honour the god of the sanctuary, Apollo. The Athenian treasury is the first explicit example of bringing the main goddess of a dedicating city to the fore. Other monuments continue this device: the Eurymedon Palm-tree, the Marathon group, and so forth. By doing this, Athens plays a unique card: her city name. No other great polis had this privilege: a name that contained the name of one of the great divinities. By stressing this fact and claiming Athena's special favour through ambitious public monuments, Athens monopolized this panhellenic goddess in an emphatic way.

The second new construction was the famous series of combats, fought by protagonists of religious and political order against the forces of hybris, violence, and injustice. The gigantomachy, centauromachy, and amazonomachy were

favourite themes of the compact polis ideology beginning in the first half of the 6th century B.C. These were independent paradigmatic myths of polis communities used in various places of the Greek world. In 5th century Athens, however, these myths were transformed into a linear series leading from primordial times directly to the historical and present-day city of Athens. In the famous public funeral speeches, the military achievements of the Athenians against the Amazons, the Thracians, as well as in the Trojan War are interpreted as mythical predecessors of the victories against the Persians and against present-day enemies. Public monuments, the Stoa Poikile, the Parthenon, and others, extend this series in various directions: In the gigantomachy the fight for the world's order is traced back to the gods, claiming a principal role for Athens' city goddess Athena. In paintings of the centauromachy the role of Theseus is more and more emphasized. The battle against the amazons is re-designed by Aischylos as well as in the paintings of the Stoa Poikile as a prefiguration of the defence of Athens against the Persians. Last but not least in the Eion herms the Trojan war is interpreted as a demonstration of Athenian virtue, and the colossal monument of the Trojan horse on the Athenian Acropolis showed Athenian heroes as the protagonists of the panhellenic enterprise.

The characteristic strategy of this patriotic mythmaking is to take over the great paradigmatic myths that were valid in the whole Greek world, and at the same time to declare them as specifically Athenian achievements – which almost inevitably led to Athens' superior position in the present Greek world. This strategy was complemented by the well-known ideology of autochthony which created an absolutely unbeatable genealogical claim of Athenian uniqueness. Thus genealogical and local 'identity' served as a device of highly exclusive and aggressive political claims which involved an enormous explosive potential of conflict.

5. Identity and the historian

As a conclusion, I would like to raise two general questions, one regarding the scientific reach of these results, the other concerning our own role as historians.

Firstly, the results regarding the changing existence, experience and creation of paradigmatic versus genealogical and local identities have been gained on the basis of images decorating objects of private life and of monuments erected in public spaces. Thus, all such testimonies belong to specific spheres of life, to discourses during the symposium, funerary rituals, assertions of piety and social status in sacred places, political representation in city centres and panhellenic sanctuaries. What we have to ask, and what I want to ask the group at this

colloquium, is whether these results, in case they are convincing in themselves, can be considered generally valid for the specific societies and epochs - or whether other sources referring to other sectors of life present us with different pictures, thus testifying to sectorial identities.

Secondly, our task as historians is to preserve and create historical memory. For many this also means to preserve and create collective identity based on common memories. Considering the highly problematic character of collective identity if founded on a collective reference to an exclusive 'proper' past, I am not convinced of the healthiness of such an operation. Rather, I would prefer a wider concept: a comparative view, free from the claim of identification, on historical pasts, including paradigmatic as well as foreign and opposite concepts, with the aim of exploring them as a wide field of interested experience.