Ancient Necropolitics

MALTREATING THE LIVING, ABUSING THE DEAD IN GREEK ANTIQUITY

Edited by
EFIMIA D. KARAKANTZA
ALEXANDROS VELAORAS
& MARION MEYER

BRILL

MNEMOSYNE SUPPLEMENTS MONOGRAPHS ON GREEK AND LATIN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Mnemosyne Supplements

MONOGRAPHS ON GREEK AND LATIN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

VOLUME 492

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/mns*

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LEIDEN | BOSTON

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at https://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024061932

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 0169-8958
ISBN 978-90-04-71840-1 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-71843-2 (e-book)
DOI 10.1163/9789004718432

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

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Preface

It is our shared interest in the study of various aspects of death and funeral practices in Greek antiquity that brought the three of us together. We have all taught courses on one related subject or the other in secondary or tertiary education as well: *Antigone*, the *Iliad*, the materialities of death, the commemoration of the dead, the funeral oration, the politics of lamentation … However, it was a fortuitous encounter, one day in the summer of 2019, between Efimia Karakantza and Osman Balkan (Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania) which was meant to change the way we understood and talked about death for good.

Osman Balkan had just contributed a chapter to Banu Bargu's edited volume *Turkey's Necropolitical Laboratory: Democracy, Violence, and Resistance* (2019). His chapter was on 'the cemetery of traitors', the burial ground established by the Turkish authorities for the putschists killed during the failed military coup against the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 15 July 2016. In the framework of the Lauder Europe Regional Program of the University of Pennsylvania, which he then directed, Osman Balkan and participating students came to Athens, perhaps the most appropriate place to study 'Democracy'. During a common visit to the ancient *agora*, Efimia and Osman talked about the birth of democracy with the 'Athenian Revolution' of 508/507 BCE and the reforms of Cleisthenes, but the conversation soon shifted to Antigone and the prohibition of Polyneices' burial. The similarities in the treatment of the dead in the Greek myth as it was reinvented by Sophocles and during the recent events in Turkey were striking.

Efimia and Alexandros read Balkan's chapter (Osman had kindly sent it to Efimia before the volume came out) and they were both impressed by the new avenues that the concept of necropolitics seemed capable of opening to the study not only of *Antigone* but other key aspects of death in Ancient Greece. Balkan's chapter, and Bargu's entire volume, which we also read when it became available, led us back to Achille Mbembe, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler—to mention but a few key theorists. The more we read about bio- and necropolitics, the more we became sure that we could break new ground in Classics.

With Marion Meyer, a loyal friend of the University of Patras, we had for some time wanted to cooperate. Our interest in 'ancient necropolitics' and hers in the commemoration of the dead provided a promising common ground. It was Marion who suggested we should propose a panel for the International Conference in Classics and Ancient History, which was going to be organized

by the Centre for Classical and Humanistic Studies of the University of Coimbra on 22–25 June 2020. We spent a few weeks enthusiastically preparing our proposal, which was immediately accepted by the Conference organizers. And then, in December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and the world came to a halt. The Conference was postponed for a year, during which necropolitics became a lived experience in several parts of the globe. It eventually took place in Coimbra in June 2021 (in hybrid mode, with us present—our first opportunity to meet colleagues abroad in person after the outbreak of the pandemic).

The present volume arises from our panel "Ancient Necropolitics: Politicizing Death and the Dead in Ancient Greece." It focuses on ancient necropolitics and brings together reworked versions of selected papers which were delivered on that panel. It also includes four chapters written by colleagues whose work, we felt, would enrich the discussion we had opened in Coimbra. If only academic and other commitments had allowed more colleagues to contribute. We wish to thank all authors for their collaboration; the participants in the panel and its audience for the stimulating discussions we had in person or via Zoom; and everyone at Brill for their assistance during the publication process.

Athens/Vienna, June 2024
The editors
Efimia D. Karakantza
Alexandros Velaoras
Marion Meyer

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PART 1

Theoretical Considerations

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: From Necropolitics to Ancient Necropolitics

Alexandros Velaoras

the most ancient and brutal form of government: necropolitics
PAUL B. PRECIADO[1]

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1 What Is 'Necropolitics'?

Necropolitics is not a word you can look up in a dictionary. It has not entered the third edition of the authoritative *Oxford English Dictionary* yet and it will most likely take some time before it does.[2] However, the effects of necropolitics are readily visible in everyday life: the disproportionate impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on socioeconomic and racial minorities, who not only live in (Mbembe would say 'are exposed to') conditions that foster ill-health but also face immense barriers when accessing healthcare;[3] or the impact, again disproportionate, of 'extreme' environmental conditions and natural disasters on the victims of neoliberal policies—the dispossessed, the disposable;[4] or the plight of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, who become *homines sacri* (if they do not perish in their effort to cross the Mediterranean or other international sea borders) and remain, often for an indeterminate period of time,

1 Quotation from "Necropolitics—French Style," in Preciado 2019:69–70. I wish to express my gratitude to Efimia Karakantza and Marion Meyer, my co-editors, for their assistance at various stages of writing this chapter.

2 The third edition is still in preparation, but, as I was told by the editorial team in a personal communication by email (9 Aug. 2022), there are no immediate plans to include this entry in the dictionary. *Biopolitics*, first attested in 1927, was added in November 2010 (*OED Online*, s.v. 'biopolitics, n.').

3 Sandset 2021; Jagannathan and Rai 2022.

4 Like, for instance, the heatwave that hit Chicago in 1995 and Hurricane Katrina, which swept New Orleans in 2005 (see Klinenberg 1999 and Giroux 2006 respectively).

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_002

in refugee camps and detention centres, bereft of citizen rights, isolated physically, socioeconomically, and culturally;[5] or the exploitation of the material and human resources of 'developing' countries by 'developed' ones in neocolonialist contexts and the relegation of people to the status of the living dead in occupied territories and neo-apartheid regimes around the world;[6] or, finally, gendered violence and gendered death (queer deaths, femicides, and trans murders).[7] These are only a few instances of necropolitics, the effects of the differential distribution of violence and death among a population, at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

After the publication in 2003 of an influential article by philosopher and political theorist Joseph-Achille Mbembe, 'necropolitics' became a seminal concept within many scholarly fields and disciplines, including philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities.[8] In what follows, I will explore the evolution of the meaning of *necropolitics* as I trace the history of the concept, and I will argue that 'necropolitics' as a theoretical tool can be used productively in the study of premodern societies as well, namely, in our case, the Ancient Greek and Roman ones.

2 Tracing the Emergence of Necropolitics

Until the publication of Mbembe's article, the word *necropolitics*, composed of the combining form *necro-* (from *nekros* 'dead body or person')[9] and *politics*, was used to refer to the posthumous influence exerted by a person on the politics and the society of their country as well as to the exploitation of their death and/or their corpse by political allies and/or opponents.[10] The basic

5 Arendt 2017:349–396; Diken 2004; Butler and Spivak 2007; Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 164–169; Estévez 2017; Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017; Mbembe 2019:98–99.

6 Mbembe 2003; Butler and Athanasiou 2013:24–27 and 30–33.

7 Puar 2007; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014; Islekel 2021.

8 Mbembe 2003. The article was later included as Chapter 3 in Mbembe 2019 (orig. publ. in French 2016).

9 See *OED Online* s.v. 'necro-, comb. form'.

10 Ciria 1983 and Ciria 1986; Erlanger 1989; *The Times of India* 1996; Ramachandaran 1998; *National Post* 2000; *The Times of India* 2001. However, the earliest occurrence of the word *necropolitics* of which I am aware can be found in an article published in 1979 (Alan 1979). In that article, it was used to refer to the mass murder-suicide of 918 people, which had been arranged by phony faith healer James (Jim) Jones and took place in his remote jungle commune at Jonestown, Guyana, on November 18, 1978. Its meaning in that context seems to be 'the use, or spreading, of mass death as a means to make a political intervention'. Sig-

assumption in this understanding of the term is that dead bodies have a 'political life';[11] that they can be 'managed', this management being "related to the constitution, territorialization and membership of political and moral communities."[12]

But the theory on the politicization of death and its transformation into the object of power in Modernity came as a response to, or an outgrowth of, Michel Foucault's theory on the politicization of life.[13] In the late 1970s, Foucault introduced the concept of the 'biopolitics of the human race' to refer to the new technology of power which emerged in the latter half of the 18th century. This technology of power scientifically studies, in order to control, the processes of birth, death, reproduction, illness, and so on. Thus, the premodern right of the sovereign to take life or let live is now complemented by a new right: to make live and to let die. Biopolitics, unlike the disciplinary technologies which preceded it, does not target the body of the individual but an entire population. Its objective is not to punish lawbreakers or those who threaten the sovereign but to control and regulate the biological processes of the human race with the aim of controlling and regulating the productivity and the functionality of the body of the human as a species. As a result, power as the right to take an individual life wanes; it is the power to intervene in favour of mass life that now prevails. However, as Foucault specified a few years later, when mass life becomes the State's preoccupation, the State is also entitled to spread mass death if necessary. So biopolitics turns into its reverse, 'thanatopolitics'.[14] This has important implications. In a political system centred on biopower, in order to determine who must live and who must be allowed to die, a break needs to be introduced in the biological continuum addressed by biopower. This is achieved, Foucault argues, with the inscription of racism in the mechanisms of the State. It is with recourse to racism that a population is divided into superior and inferior subgroups, those whose lives are worth fostering and those whose lives are to be disallowed to the point of death. Moreover, to justify the death-function in the economy of biopower, a relation of enmity is created between

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nificantly, all the above (with the exception of Ciria 1983 and Ciria 1986) are journalistic articles.

11 An allusion to Katherine Verdery's excellent study of the political management of dead bodies across Eastern Europe in the postsocialist era (Verdery 1999). Verdery does *not*, however, use the term *necropolitics*.

12 Stepputat 2014c:5.

13 Foucault 1998 and Foucault 2003. See also Makrynioti 2008:39–47 and Stepputat 2014b:15–18.

14 Foucault 2000:416.

the two groups: the latter is perceived as a threat to the former and it must be eliminated. Racism thus becomes the precondition for exercising the right to kill (or let die).[15]

In his famous *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (originally published in Italian in 1995), philosopher Giorgio Agamben builds on Foucault and extends the discussion on the production of a biopolitical body as the primary *and original* activity of sovereign power. Sovereign power, according to Agamben, does not only manage life; it also needs to manage death in the logic of a politics rooted in an exclusionary principle. He explains that "one of the essential characteristics of modern biopolitics … is its constant need to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside"; the lives which deserve to be lived and those which do not.[16] Biopolitics thus turns into 'thanatopolitics'.[17] The *homo sacer* of the title, a figure in archaic Roman law that could be killed with impunity but not sacrificed, instantiates the concept of a life at the limit, between life and death; a 'bare life' that becomes political by being excluded from the city (e.g. the Jew, the refugee).[18] Agamben concludes that, when a society reaches the thanatopolitical level, the way biopower is exercised is not affected by the political nature of the regime. So, the state of exception[19] tends to be normalized, contemporary democracies naturally perpetuate totalitarianism, and contemporary societies can be readily compared to concentration camps. Although Agamben does not use the term 'necropolitics', his analysis of sovereign power and sovereign violence sets the ground for the necropolitical problematic.

'Necropolitics' was first defined by postcolonial theorist Joseph-Achille Mbembe in what is now considered the landmark essay on the concept. Mbembe

15 On the relation of enmity, cf. Mbembe 2019:42–65.

16 Agamben 1998:131 and 136–143. Cf. Judith Butler's famous reflection on the livability of life and the grievability of death in twenty-first-century war contexts, namely the American war waged in Afghanistan by the Bush administration after 9/11 (Butler 2006, esp. pp. 19–49; and Butler 2016). These same events prompted Mbembe to write his 2003 article (Mbembe 2012:131).

17 Agamben 1998:122. *Thanatopolitics* 'a politics of death' (from *thanato-* 'death' and *politics*) is generally considered to be the reverse of *biopolitics* (by, e.g., Foucault, Agamben, and Roberto Esposito). Esposito 2008 discusses 'thanatopolitics' through the paradigm of autoimmunity. For S.J. Murray 2006 and 2019, on the contrary, thanatopolitics is more than "merely the lethal underside of biopolitics"; see n. 21 below.

18 Athanasiou 2007:15–17.

19 Agamben 2005.

> put forward the notion of necropolitics and necropower to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*.[20]

The nineteenth-century plantation system, the colonies, the Apartheid regime in South Africa, and the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine are all, according to Mbembe, examples of such death-worlds in which the 'state of exception' and the 'state of siege' are normalized. 'Necropolitics', according to Mbembe, thus refers, primarily, to the sovereign's power not only to 'let die' but also to 'make die'. Unlike previous theorists, however, Mbembe also recognizes the potential of resistance to necropolitics in the figure of the suicide bomber, who instantiates the 'logic of martyrdom' and in whose case "resistance and self-destruction are synonymous."[21]

Recently, political theorist Banu Bargu extended Mbembe's definition of necropolitics to "refer to an entire ensemble of diverse practices that target the dead as surrogate for, and means of, targeting the living":

> In distinction from other forms of death-making, I use necropolitical violence to denote those acts that target the dead bodies of those killed in armed conflict, by way of their mutilation, dismemberment, denuding, desecration, dragging, and public display, the destruction of local cemeteries and other sacred spaces that are designated for communication with and commemoration of the dead, the delay, interruption, or suspension of the conduct of funerary rituals, the imposition of mass or anonymous internment [*sic*], the pressure for clandestine internment [*sic*],[22] and the repression and dispersion of funeral processions for the newly dead. At issue is not the reduction of the living to "the status of living dead," but something else altogether: the dishonoring, disciplining,

20 Mbembe 2003:40.

21 Mbembe 2003:35–39; Bargu 2019c:9–10. Cf. Murray, for whom thanatopolitics "is itself a productive power in the voices of those who biopolitical power 'lets die'," exposing "the fault-lines of biopolitical logics" (Murray 2019:718–719). Thus, "thanatopolitics … is both a response and a resistance to biopolitical power and to the Western conception of rational sovereignty with which biopolitics is allied" (Murray 2006:195). Recently, however, Murray revised his thesis; see Murray 2022 (esp. pp. 36–41).

22 An obvious typo, silently corrected in subsequent quotations of the passage in this volume.

> and punishment of the living through the utilization of the dead as post-mortem objects and sites of violence.[23]

While the meaning and application of the term is still being negotiated in social and political sciences, the editors of this volume believe that it is time to validate Paul B. Preciado's claim (used as the epigraph of this introductory chapter) that necropolitics is "*the most ancient* and brutal form of government."[24]

3 Tracing Necropolitics in Ancient Greece

As was explained in the previous section, the emergence of necropolitics is situated in the modern era and it may at first seem only too natural that this theoretical framework has rarely been applied to the study of premodern states and societies.[25] One purpose of this volume is to extend the application of necropolitics as an interpretive tool to Greek antiquity. And there is good reason for this. Examples of 'ancient necropolitics' in Ancient Greek literature (Archaic, Classical, and Post-classical) abound (see Chapters 2 to 6) and, as it is suggested in Chapters 6 to 9, they reflect contemporary reality.

The earliest work of Western literature, the *Iliad*, for example, is rich in instances of necropolitical violence: the most famous of all is Achilles' maltreatment of the dead Hector (22.395–404). However, the poem is also replete with unburied fallen warriors, whose dead bodies are desecrated by scavenging animals, an atrocity deplored by the poet in the opening lines (1.4–5). The abandonment of the dead warriors on the battlefield, Cezary Kucewicz argues in his contribution (Chapter 2), was neither universal nor coincidental. The differential post-mortem treatment of the fallen was determined by, and at the same time reproduced in the Greek army, sociopolitical hierarchies observed in Archaic Greek society at large. Instances of *ataphia* 'non-burial' occur in tragedy as well but for punitive purposes. Certain dead persons are denied burial for having committed political crimes, like the title heroes in Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Antigone*. In Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, too (as in Aeschylus' lost

23 Bargu 2016:n.p. = Bargu 2019a:213.

24 Emphasis added. See also Henao Castro 2023 for a comprehensive survey of the history and meaning of 'necropolitics'.

25 To the best of my knowledge, the only applications of necropolitics as an explanatory tool to Greek and Roman antiquity so far are those of Smith 2021 and Karakantza 2022. Biopolitics, on the other hand, has been used as a heuristic concept in Classics more often: Žukauskaitė 2010; Weiner 2015; Ojakangas 2013; Ojakangas 2016; Ojakangas 2017; Hawkins 2018; Backman and Cimino 2022.

Eleusinians), the Thebans refuse to return the corpses of the dead Argive soldiers to their families for burial, thus violating a standard procedure in Archaic and Classical warfare, the *anairesis*, i.e. the collection of corpses from the battlefield. It has been argued that Euripides' *Suppliant Women* was inspired by a historical event, the Boeotians' refusal to return the dead Athenians for burial after the battle at Delium (424 BCE), recorded in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (4.89–101).[26]

Another well-known case of 'ancient necropolitics' recorded by Thucydides is the siege of Melos in 416 BCE, which resulted in the slaughter of all adult men and the enslavement of women and children (5.84–113). That is in fact not the only occurrence of 'urbicide' in Thucydides' narrative. 'Urbicide' means the physical destruction of a *polis* 'city-state' and the massacre and enslavement of all its people, and it is considered a kind of genocide. In 428/427 BCE, Mytilene on the island of Lesbos defected from the Delian League, but soon an Athenian army forced her to capitulate. The Athenian assembly decided to execute all male citizens of Mytilene, only to revoke its decision in another assembly the following day (3.2–6, 8–18, 25, and 27–50). In 423 BCE, to punish Scione, a city in northern Greece subject to Athens, for its defection, the Athenians passed a decree ordering its destruction and the death of its entire population (4.122.6). Two years later, when they captured Scione, "they killed the grown men, enslaved the children and women, and granted occupation of the land to the Plataeans" (ἀπέκτειναν τοὺς ἡβῶντας, παῖδας δὲ καὶ γυναῖκας ἠνδραπόδισαν, καὶ τὴν γῆν Πλαταιεῦσιν ἔδοσαν νέμεσθαι, 5.32.1 [trans. Hammond]).[27] As Mbembe explains, the mass distribution of death is a performance of sovereignty.[28] By annihilating its revolting or defecting allies, Athens was in fact shoring up and reaffirming its sovereign power in the Delian League/Athenian Empire.

Necropolitical violence was used as punishment and/or for the performance of sovereignty on a smaller scale, too, and in that case it could often take the form of a public spectacle.[29] In Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, Jesse Weiner argues in Chapter 3, after slaughtering the suitors, Odysseus had the slave women killed by Telemachus, who hanged them and, presumably (for we are not told what is done with their bodies), left them suspended long enough for the other slaves, at least Eurycleia, to see (22.465–473). In that way,

26 E.g. by Whitehorn 1986:68; Rehm 1992:129; Bowie 1997; and Toher 2001:342.

27 For a definition of 'urbicide' and a list of urbicide cases from the 6th century to 330 BCE, see Cartledge 2023.

28 Mbembe 2003.

29 See n. 59 in Chapter 6.

Odysseus re-established himself as sovereign over his *oikos* 'household' and Telemachus asserted his own claim to sovereignty. In [Aeschylus'] *Prometheus Bound*, Zeus punished the Titan for stealing fire and giving it to humans by subjecting him to a torture which must have brought to the audience's mind *apotympanismos* 'death on the plank'.[30] *Apotympanismos* was a public 'ritual'. Significantly, in the first lines which Prometheus speaks on stage he invites all natural elements to witness his suffering (ἴδεσθε, 92 and δέρχθηθ', 93; cf. θεωρός, 118; ὁρᾶτε, 119; δέρχθητ', ἐσίδεσθ', 141; λεύσσω, 144). The victim was exposed to public view, insulted, and taunted, which was meant to intimidate all witnesses.

Plutarch in the *Life of Pericles* (28.1–3) relates Douris the Samian's account (FGrH 76 F 67) of how, in the Samian War of 440 BCE, the Samian trierarchs and marines who had taken part in the revolt against Athens were fastened to planks in the main square of Miletus, and, after ten days of exposure, beaten to death with wooden clubs and denied burial. The historicity of this event has been disputed (even by Plutarch himself). However, the *apotympanismos* of the Samian trierarchs as related by the author constituted an Athenian public display of sovereignty, and it suggests, along with the cases of urbicide mentioned earlier, that necropolitics was well-inscribed in the collective imaginary of the Athenians and that it played an important role in Athenian imperialist politics.[31] (The same seems to be true of Rome during the late Republic. As Katerina Oikonomopoulou argues in Chapter 8, Rome's imperialist expansion led to such practices as maltreating the bodies of dead enemies and mocking them post mortem, which had been regarded as typically barbarian.)

Besides, archaeological finds during old and recent excavations of the cemetery of the Phaleron Delta (dating from the last decades of the 8th to the latter half of the 4th century BCE)[32] prove that *apotympanismos* was an ordinary method of torturing and executing those convicted to death in Athens—an intentionally dishonouring one, as Angeliki Syrkou explains in Chapter 9. The non-normative burial of the Phaleron convicts, like that of other categories of dead (e.g. victims of a plague or of warfare, the physically deformed etc.), additionally reveals, Dimitrios Bosnakis explains in Chapter 7, the contemporary concern for the maintenance of social order. It also suggests, however, that in

30 ὑπαίθριος δεσμοῖς πεπασσαλευμένος 'pinned in these bonds under the open sky', 113 (trans. Sommerstein).

31 See Karakantza 2022:210–211.

32 On which see Chryssoulaki 2022 (with further bibliography). The latest finds have yet to be fully discussed and interpreted.

antiquity, as in modern times, some people did not deserve a grievable death—and some people (the deformed, for instance)[33] did not deserve a liveable life either; their life did not count.

With this suggestion as a starting point, Efimia Karakantza argues in Chapter 4 that Ajax in Sophocles' tragedy was treated as a 'lesser' human being by goddess Athena, the Atreidae, and the Achaeans. For that reason, his life became unliveable and his death ungrievable. Likewise, when in 399 BCE the Spartans asked the Athenians for 300 riders to serve in their expedition in Asia, the Athenians sent men who had fought for the Thirty because, Xenophon writes, they thought "that for them to live and die in foreign parts would be all to the good of the democracy" (οἱ δ' ἔπεμψαν τῶν ἐπὶ τῶν τριάκοντα ἱππευσάντων, νομίζοντες κέρδος τῷ δήμῳ, εἰ ἀποδημοῖεν καὶ ἐναπόλοιντο, *Hellenica* 3.1.4).[34] In this case, necropolitics also served a boundary-maintenance function: fighting for the Thirty, that is siding with the oligarchic party, placed these men outside the community of Athens.

In Chapter 6, I suggest that such diverse necropolitical practices as the ones mentioned above were not unrelated, but all belonged to what I call with reference to Classical Athens 'the Athenian necropolitical micro-apparatus' (i.e. the Foucauldian *dispositif*). The aim of this micro-apparatus was to bolster the nascent democracy and protect it from attempts at subverting it and restoring a tyranny or, towards the end of the 5th century, an oligarchic regime. It also aimed at consolidating the developing imperial power of Athens and suppressing revolt among its allies. The intertwinement of democracy, ancient and modern, with necropolitics may sound awkward, even embarrassing. However, it was a lived practice, and, as Zina Giannopoulou shows in her contribution (Chapter 5), it could meet with resistance.

These cases, not all of which are explored in this volume, incite us to have recourse to the originality and theoretical resourcefulness of 'necropolitics' with the certainty that hitherto unthought aspects of the Ancient Greek World will be revealed. At the same time, they invite us to re-evaluate the relevance of ancient thought for our understanding of necropolitics in the 21st century. (Special reference needs to be made to 'archaeopolitics', a public discourse that

33 Patterson 1985:113: "The exposure of the physically defective infant is usually—and correctly I think—considered a routine practice in ancient Greece."

34 Trans. Warner. This attitude was not unprecedented; cf. Herodotus 3.44 and Thucydides 3.75.2. See also How and Wells 1912:2.229 on Herodotus 7.222. An analogous attitude was prevalent from the 16th to the 18th century with regards to colonization: "it thrived by excreting those who were, in several regards, deemed superfluous, a surfeit within the colonizing nations" (Mbembe 2019:10–11).

has lately emerged, especially in Greece, which is both political and archaeological, in that it feeds off archaeophile sentiments in order to manage life in the present, often by implementing a thanato- or necropolitical agenda.)[35] It is the editors' hope that the present collection of essays will further the scholarly discussion initiated here and expand it in areas which are unexplored or worth revisiting through the conceptual lens of necropolitics.[36]

4 This Volume

The volume consists of ten chapters (including this Introduction) grouped in four parts, which treat different aspects of necropolitics in Greek antiquity. Part 1 comprises the present introduction to the volume with the necessary theoretical considerations. Part 2 comprises five chapters on necropolitics in literature (from Homer's epics to Attic tragedy). In most of these chapters, a clear relation is detected between necropolitics in the texts discussed (as configurations of the imaginary) and necropolitics in the culture of their authors.

In Chapter 2, "Necropolitics in the *Iliad*: Between Myth and Reality," Cezary Kucewicz discusses the politics of death in Homer's *Iliad*. Although Achilles' maltreatment of Hector's dead body is the most notorious instance of necropolitical violence in the poem, Kucewicz concentrates on post-mortem violence against non-elite fighters—an issue that has often been overlooked despite the fact that killing and dying are central issues in the poem. He argues that the striking difference in handling fallen *aristoi* 'noblest men' and fallen ordinary men is a potent means of constructing a sociopolitical hierarchy. Whereas elite warriors were given a lavish burial (with Patroclus' burial as the prime example), ordinary war dead were usually left untended on the battlefield, a prey for scavengers. Occasionally, they might be hastily washed and collectively burnt. Turning from epic to real life, the author claims that in Archaic times, a hierarchy in the treatment of the war dead can indeed be observed: contrary to the *communis opinio*, he argues that mass burials near the battlefield were not normal practice. Individual fighters were retrieved and commemorated by

35 Plantzos 2023b:74–76 with n. 74. See also Plantzos 2016 and Plantzos 2023a.

36 Like, to mention but one example, the representation of foreigners in literature, on stage, and in art, which brings into relief issues of ethnicity and points to the existence in the Ancient Greek world of 'racism', a prerequisite for necropolitics. See, among others, Hall 1989 and Isaac 2004. The latter argues that although scientific racism did not exist in antiquity, an entire set of beliefs and ideas circulating in the Greek and Roman world could be labelled 'proto-racist'.

their families (if these could organize the transport), whereas the masses were hastily buried in a way that would not leave archaeological traces.

In Chapter 3, "Odysseus' Corpses: Necropolitics and Homer's *Odyssey*," Jesse Weiner offers a consistent reading of Odysseus' judicious treatment of the suitors, the slave women of his household, and the shepherd Melanthius in Book 22 as examples of necropolitics. Odysseus kills the suitors (instead of accepting reparations that would have made him richer than he had ever been) as well as the slave women who slept with them. He also mutilates Melanthius. Odysseus thus demonstrates his right, as a sovereign, to take life, and thereby reestablishes his status as the *kyrios* 'master' of his *oikos* and as the king of Ithaca. By taking the decision not to have the slave women killed by the sword but by hanging, Telemachus follows his father in demonstrating his power to decide over life and death and thus presents himself as the future sovereign.

In Chapter 4, "Sophocles' *Ajax*: The Necropolitical Treatment of the Hero's Life and Death," Efimia D. Karakantza reads Sophocles' *Ajax* with recourse to Agamben. According to her, the title hero is a prime instance of an object of necropower. Ajax's life becomes unliveable; his death becomes ungrievable. From the start, she explains, Ajax is regarded and treated as a 'lesser' human being by the goddess Athena, the Atreidae, and the Achaeans. In fact, the hunting metaphor and vocabulary used in the opening scene of the play, when Ajax is being 'hunted down' by Odysseus, equates him with the animals that he himself had hunted down and killed. Ajax thus resembles the Agambenian *homo sacer*, whose life under Roman law was placed outside both human and divine law and whom anyone in the community could therefore kill with impunity. His status is also close to *atimia* 'disenfranchisement', which denotes the suspension of the legal and juridical order for a certain individual. The deprivation of civic rights makes Ajax an outlaw whose life is 'bare'. After his suicide, there is a debate about whether or not his degraded corpse should be buried. During that debate, the sovereign's discourse is articulated. The play concludes with Ajax's burial, but a hasty and rudimentary one, as Karakantza underlines.

In Chapter 5, "Enacting Necropolitics in Sophocles' *Antigone*," Zina Giannopoulou revisits Sophocles' *Antigone* as "enacting necropolitics" from the beginning to the end. She consistently argues that the tragedy contains all the elements that Mbembe defined as the components of necropolitics: the enmity/friendship polarity; the enemy's physical elimination; the use of space for the creation of death-worlds; and the suicide bomber as a figure of resistance to necropower. Thebes is a kind of death-world, a city "made sick by a sick king." Antigone challenges Creon's strict friend/enemy distinction and his *nomos* 'law' as sovereign. After burying her brother, according to the principle of *philia*, she is conscious of living in a mental death-world. The cave she

is sent to in order to die—a half-natural, half-artificial structure—showcases, Giannopoulou argues, the three features of necropower: it is a separate space that will conceal Antigone; a subterranean space thus visualizing her subordinate status; and a space of infrastructural warfare because Antigone is supposed to starve enclosed in the cave. However, Antigone assumes agency and gains autonomy by committing suicide, and Haemon, after a violent encounter with his father, joins his bride by killing himself, thus undoing Creon's necropower.

In Chapter 6, "The Non-Burial at Thebes: Attic Tragedy and the Athenian Necropolitical Micro-Apparatus," I argue, with reference to select tragedies from the 'Theban cycle' as well as to historiography and oratory, that in Classical Athens there was a 'necropolitical micro-apparatus' (a Foucauldian micro-*dispositif*), which comprised an entire array of at first glance unrelated discourses and practices. Through them the sovereign *dēmos* 'citizenry' exercised their right to 'take life or let live' according to the premodern conception of sovereign power, or displayed their power over the dead through the deployment of necropolitical violence as defined by Bargu. This micro-apparatus (part of a larger apparatus of death) targeted both the living and the dead and its ultimate purpose was to safeguard the democratic regime; serve and reproduce the ideology of the *polis* by constructing the appropriate type of citizen; and in the end define who belonged within the *polis* and who did not.

The three chapters forming Part 3 deal with the material evidence of ancient necropolitics. The historical sources and archaeological finds discussed in them constitute a body of evidence that points to the politically motivated degrading treatment of the dead and/or the living. Some of this evidence has only recently become the subject of debate (and most often in modern Greek). In Chapter 7, "Deviations from Necro-Normality in Ancient Greek *Poleis*: The Governance of the Corpse (Modalities and Symbolisms)," Dimitrios Bosnakis shows how the funeral rite, with its formalism and symbolism, was not only a ritual performance for the demise of each member of the city but was also used to convey to social networks the final account of the community for the behaviour and actions of the deceased. War dead were buried at public expense in a luxurious honorific ceremony. Those who were guilty of serious offences (e.g. temple robbers, traitors, and aspiring tyrants), on the contrary, would be denied burial. Between these two extremes, that is between honour and disgrace, there is a grey area in burial practices. With regards to the mode, the topography, and the treatment of the corpse, a wide range of non-normative burials emerge, suggesting negative contexts (extreme conditions under which a burial took place) or negative associations (such as lack of respect and care in the handling of the corpse). This chapter presents an overview of the types of these interments as well as the main interpretative problems arising from the differential treatment

of all these nameless dead. Beyond their social implications, unintentional or conscious degradation or deliberate insult of the dead, all these rite deviations are actions of a milder intensity than the refusal of burial, and in some cases are consistent with necrophobic superstitions.

In Chapter 8, "Necropolitical Violence and Roman Power in Imperial Greek Biography and Historiography," Katerina Oikonomopoulou scrutinizes how three Greek authors of the Roman Imperial period, Plutarch, Appian, and Cassius Dio, depict necropolitical violence in Republican Rome in their writings. She argues that the history of the Roman Republic (and particularly its latest phase) was relevant for the Greeks' understanding of their own position—and their negotiating of this position—in the Roman Empire. All three authors sided with the *optimates*. They saw the recurrent stasis in Republican Rome as a decisive factor in its downfall (see especially Appian's *Civil Wars*), and they appreciated the *pax Augusta* and the ensuing period of peace in Imperial Rome. The accounts of brutal treatment of Romans by Romans (with the outrageous treatment of Cicero's severed head and hands by Antony, gruesomely narrated by all three authors, as the climax) raises the question, according to Oikonomopoulou, whether Rome's imperialist expansion led to practices that had been considered typically barbarian.

In Chapter 9, "Forms of Necropolitical Violence in Antiquity," Angeliki Syrkou approaches tortures in antiquity through the theoretical framework of necropolitics. She shows that the acceptance of Christianity did not lead to an end of cruelty toward offenders but to a wide use of practices with a long tradition, like crucifixion and death on the *furca* 'a fork-shaped instrument of punishment', which were in fact developed forms of *apotympanismos* 'death on the plank' and *anaskolopismos* 'impalement'. Following Foucault, she argues that there was societal racism in the treatment of accused persons as their punishment depended on their social status rather than on their crimes alone. This reaffirmed the social hierarchy and exemplified the state's biopower and necropolitics. Torture and cruel forms of capital punishment were inflicted mainly on persons of low class or slaves. Syrkou concentrates on this group and discusses various forms of necropolitical violence: immobilizing captives by hand and foot cuffs, torture (by the strap, the whip, and the staff), decapitation, *apotympanismos*, *anaskolopismos*, crucifixion, death on the *furca*, hanging, and post-mortem maltreatment.

Finally, Part 4 is devoted to necropolitics in classical reception. In Chapter 10, "A Necropolitics of Posthuman Bodies? Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Lobster* (2015) and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017)," Benjamin Eldon Stevens re-questions the validity/certainty of notions such as the human body, life, and death in the context of *thanato*-politics or *necro*-politics. This is subsumed in the question

"when is a body—when is somebody—meaningfully dead?" The exploration begins with considering the genre of supernatural horror (devoted to dead but 'not still gone'), which represents the body as a "site of political signification" from the perspectives of bio-, thanato-, and necropolitics. Supernatural horror engenders monstrosity and monsters (hybrid creatures) in classical myths which might represent social upheaval. They also lead us to wider reconsideration of received ideas about 'classical humanism', especially if we consider that classics arose in power-structures including European colonialism and imperialism. Lanthimos offers critical (satirical) depictions of modernity in part via classical receptions: of Oedipus in *The Lobster*, to "expose the profound deathliness of the superficially life-affirming genre of romantic comedy"; and of *Iphigeneia in Aulis* in *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, to reaffirm that "the modern *oikos* is not a 'safe house' but another (dis)place for the violence required by the state." The films can be said to reconfigure a 'posthumanist necropolitics'. In matchmaking (*The Lobster*) as in medicine (*The Killing of a Sacred Deer*), human bodies "are not simply either 'living' or 'dead' " but sites for exerting violence and setting the divide between " 'lives' that are thought 'worth living' and others marked for '(living) death.' "

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PART 2

Necropolitics in Configurations of the Imaginary

∴

CHAPTER 2

Necropolitics in the *Iliad*: Between Myth and Reality

Cezary Kucewicz

1 Introduction

Over the last decade, the concept of necropolitics has made a marked impact on our understanding of the social and political powers inscribed upon the body and the realm of the dead.[1] Ever since the influential article of Achille Mbembe (2003), the discourse of necropolitics, which focuses on the relationship between sovereignty and power over the processes of life and death, has allowed scholars to investigate war atrocities and other instances of bodily harm and violence through the prism of larger processes targeting and politicizing the dead.[2] The scope of scholarly works applying its theoretical framework, nonetheless, has rarely extended into pre-modern states and societies, including those of the ancient world. This gap is, in many ways, surprising. For many classicists, reading the disturbing accounts of maltreating and mutilating the dead in the necropolitical studies of modern societies will likely bring to mind passages of similar brutality that famously feature in the *Iliad*.[3] The poem abounds in vivid descriptions of men deliberately mutilating the bodies of their opponents, alongside threats to deny burial, repeatedly issued to both foes and subordinates. The central focus on death in the *Iliad* makes it, therefore, an obvious candidate for a full-scale necropolitical study. In this chapter, I will provide an inroad into the latter, focusing especially on the themes of burial and exposure, which lie at the heart of the hierarchical power struc-

1 I am grateful to the editors for their invitation to contribute a chapter and their critical insights. I am also indebted to Caroline Musgrove and Ram Natarajan for their comments on an early draft. My work on this chapter has been funded by the National Science Centre, Poland (project number: 2020/39/D/HS3/02179).

2 O'Dell 2013:508.

3 The disturbing accounts of the death and maltreatment of Kevser Eltürk and Hacı Lokman Birlik, mentioned by Banu Bargu in her study of necropolitics in the context of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict (2019a), provide harrowing parallels to the maltreatment of the body of Hector, dragged by Achilles behind his chariot around Troy. On the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, see O'Connor 2021.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_003

tures of Homeric society. After providing a brief methodological overview, I will examine the socio-political significance of the bodies of elite and non-elite fallen warriors in the *Iliad*, before finally investigating whether the necropolitics of the poem could have had any basis in the historical realities of early Greek communities.

2 Why Necropolitics?

According to Mbembe's definition, necropolitics refers to "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" that derive from the sovereign's control over mortality.[4] Necropolitical forms of violence, in other words, provide radical means for states to exercise their sovereignty, the ultimate expression of which resides "in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die."[5] The extreme ends of 'necropower', as Mbembe demonstrated in his pioneering study of late-modern colonial states, lead to the creation of 'death-worlds'—forms of existence in which certain populations are deliberately targeted and terrorized into "conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*."[6] The importance of sovereignty in necropolitical strategies of controlling 'who may live and who must die' places necropolitics in tandem with other concepts related to the regulation of processes of life and death in modern states, such as 'biopolitics' and 'thanatopolitics'.[7] But while the latter concepts focus on the various aspects (both positive and negative) of the state's power to make and sustain, as well as to take and end lives, all highly regulated and held as legitimate means of governmental power, necropolitics tends to operate outside the legislative boundaries of what is right and wrong, making it "the *permanent other of biopolitics*."[8] In Mbembe's analysis, the lawless character of colonial occupation and warfare, defined foremost by the indiscriminate right to kill members of the oppressed population, provides the prime example of necropolitics at work. Studying death and destruction as means to control other ethnic and/or religious groups in the context of wars, colonial and other armed occupation, and the fight against terror, has dom-

4 Mbembe 2003:39. See also Mbembe 2019.

5 Mbembe 2003:11.

6 Mbembe 2003:40 (original emphasis).

7 In general terms, biopolitics concerns the sovereign's control of life, thanatopolitics control of death, necropolitics control of the dead body. On biopolitics and thanatopolitics, see Foucault 1978; Foucault 2003; Agamben 1998; Agamben 1999; and the Introduction to this volume. On the differences between necropolitics and the above concepts, see Troyer 2020:123–136.

8 Bargu 2019c:5 (original emphasis).

inated the literature on necropolitics in the past two decades. Recent works, however, extend the horizon of necropolitical strategies beyond the immediate focus on war atrocities and death-making through the sovereign's right to kill.

Among the most vocal proponents of the call to 'pluralize necropolitics' and move beyond a monolithic interpretation of the term has been Banu Bargu. In her edited volume on necropolitics in Turkey (2019b), Bargu gathered a collection of essays which surveyed the multifaceted nature of the "necropolitical undercurrent" of modern Turkey's political regime.[9] The volume shone a light on other, often less visible, forms of violence which target the realm of the dead but are not always manifested in death and destruction. Studying modalities of necropolitics beyond death-making, the essays pointed to the sheer heterogeneity of practices which utilize the dead to subjugate the living and demarcate political and ethnic boundaries, without necessarily reducing populations to the status of 'living dead'. Bargu provided a list of these practices in her own chapter, aptly titled "Another Necropolitics," proposing a new interpretation of necropolitical violence as constituting any acts

> that target the dead bodies of those killed in armed conflict, by way of their mutilation, dismemberment, denuding, desecration, dragging and public display, the destruction of local cemeteries and other sacred spaces that are designated for communication with and commemoration of the dead, the delay, interruption or suspension of the conduct of funerary rituals, the imposition of mass or anonymous interment, the pressure for clandestine interment and the repression and dispersion of funeral processions for the newly dead.[10]

These and similar forms of post-mortem violence are chiefly concerned with taking control of the landscapes and rituals of death, allowing states to pursue their political agendas by using the dead as "a surrogate for, and means of, targeting the living."[11] Since the care of the dead, as well as their burial and commemoration, is traditionally imbued with high cultural and religious significance, these modalities, which in Bargu's analysis have been mostly neglected in previous necropolitical studies, can carry similar political ramifications to sovereign violence associated with death-making, physical harm and other more overt forms of necropower.

9 Bargu 2019c:1.
10 Bargu 2019a:213.
11 Bargu 2019c:9.

The first question for our investigation is whether the modalities of necropolitical violence highlighted by Bargu can be successfully used in studies of pre-modern states and societies. As we already saw, the concept of necropolitics was first applied in the context of late-modern colonial occupation. Although Bargu herself stressed the wider applicability of her model, which looks at Turkey as a case study of necropolitics "in the making,"[12] she also noted that necropolitical violence consists of "a particularly biopolitical and modern form of state sovereignty, one that is both governmentalised and democratised."[13] Studying ancient societies, let alone fictional ones like the one depicted in the *Iliad*, through the lens of necropolitics poses, therefore, an immediate methodological problem. And while an exhaustive answer to it, which takes into account the full spectrum of differences between ancient and modern modes of political power and sovereignty, cannot be given here, the basic assumptions of the model provide a viable way to illuminate the socio-political dimensions of any violent practices targeting the dead, ancient or modern. The notion that the realm of the dead constitutes a substitute for the political community of the living can be accordingly taken as a starting point for our investigation, as we look at different forms of violence in the Homeric world that might be better understood from a necropolitical perspective. Since the discourse of necropolitics is always divisive and discriminating, our interest in this chapter will be predominantly in violent practices that reproduce and effectively manage the social hierarchies depicted in the epic.

Before we begin, however, it is first necessary to narrow down the scope of acts targeting the dead bodies in the *Iliad* under investigation. The reason for this is not only because of the length constraints of this chapter, but also because most of the forms of necropolitical violence featured in Bargu's list are indeed present on the Homeric battlefield.[14] These include especially the "mutilation, dismemberment, denuding, desecration, dragging and public display" of the corpses of fallen warriors, almost all of which are contained in the single storyline of Achilles' mistreatment of the body of Hector in the last two books of the poem. And the episode is certainly not exceptional.

12 Bargu 2019c:2.

13 Bargu 2019c:5.

14 The exceptions are "destruction of local cemeteries and other sacred spaces … designed for communication and commemoration of the dead," "pressure for clandestine interment," and "repression and dispersion of funeral processions for the newly dead." While some of these can be ascribed to the differences in ancient and modern burial customs, the more or less direct appearance of the majority of Bargu's other necropolitical forms in the *Iliad* remains striking.

Descriptions of warriors mutilating, decapitating, hacking off limbs and stripping the armour of the defeated fallen provide frequently occurring elements of Homeric warfare, being deeply embedded in the agonistic culture and competitive ethos of the heroes.[15] But since the subject of the mutilation of the dead in the *Iliad* has received a fair deal of attention in recent scholarship, our focus here will be on the necropolitical acts listed in the second half of Bargu's definition, namely "the delay, interruption or suspension of the conduct of funerary rituals," as well as "the imposition of mass or anonymous interment."[16] Despite being far less visible compared to the instances of spectacular violence like Achilles' mistreatment of Hector, these forms of post-mortem violence play a crucial role in articulating social divisions in the Homeric armies, turning the bodies of non-elite warriors into symbols and instruments of the socio-political hierarchies enshrined in the poem.

3 The Politics of Death in the *Iliad*

To say that death and dying feature prominently in the *Iliad* would be an understatement. According to one estimate, there are no fewer than 274 men killed in the twenty-four books of the poem, which recounts a mere few days of fighting during the final year of the conflict between the Achaeans and the Trojans.[17] And while this is hardly surprising for a poem about war and combat, the numerous, gory depictions of warriors killed in a variety of ways while fighting on battlefields littered with corpses, make death the central theme of the *Iliad*. This is apparent already from the opening lines, which mention not only the famous wrath of Achilles, but also the souls of countless Achaeans hurled into Hades because of it:

> Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληιάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
> οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρί' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,
> πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
> ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἑλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν
> οἰωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή …

15 See esp. Lendon 2000:3–11; Kucewicz 2016; Kucewicz 2021a:13–42. Stripping the armour of the fallen opponent, for both its symbolic (trophy) and monetary value, cannot, of course, be equated with deliberate denuding.

16 For recent scholarship on Homeric mutilation of the dead, see Kucewicz 2016; Kucewicz 2021a:13–42; McClellan 2017; McClellan 2019:27–41.

17 Van Wees 1996:79n146.

> Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilles and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the Achaeans, hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting of dogs, of all birds, and the will of Zeus was accomplished …
>
> *Iliad* 1.1–5[18]

Similarly, the very end of the *Iliad* brings the theme of death again to the forefront, recounting the burial ceremonies which accompanied the funeral of the Trojan prince Hector:

> χεύαντες δὲ τὸ σῆμα πάλιν κίον· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
> εὖ συναγειρόμενοι δαίνυντ᾽ ἐρικυδέα δαῖτα
> δώμασιν ἐν Πριάμοιο, διοτρεφέος βασιλῆος.
> Ὣς οἵ γ᾽ ἀμφίεπον τάφον Ἕκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο.
>
> They piled up the grave-barrow and went away, and thereafter assembled in a fair gathering and held a glorious feast within the house of Priam, king under God's hand. Such was their burial of Hector, breaker of horses.
>
> *Iliad* 24.801–804

The beginning and closing lines of the poem highlight the central importance of death in the *Iliad*; more importantly, however, they also point to the fact that death and, more precisely, burial, were not equal for all Homeric warriors. For the nameless multitudes, dying in combat meant giving their bodies to be "the delicate feasting" of dogs and birds, as they lay untended to and unburied on the battlefield. For Hector, by contrast, burial was a lengthy and lavish affair, consisting of "bringing in an endless supply of timber" for the funeral pyre, cremation, putting the bones in "a golden casket" wrapped in "soft robes of purple," piling up a grave-barrow, and concluding in "a fair gathering" and "a glorious feast" (24.782–804). This stark difference in burial ceremonies, or indeed the seeming lack of them, afforded to Homeric warriors takes us to the heart of the social world represented in the *Iliad*, in which the gulf separating ordinary men from the poem's princes and main heroes in life was most prominently expressed in what happened to the bodies of warriors in death.

18 All Greek passages are from the Loeb Classical Library edition (LCL 170–171, 2003). All translations from the *Iliad* are taken from Lattimore 2011, unless indicated otherwise.

Upon the death of a Homeric warrior in combat, the common course of events was for his comrades to retrieve his body and carry it away to safety, while fighting off any enemies wishing to strip the armour off the corpse. The widespread nature, scale, and intensity of fights over the dead in the *Iliad*, which take up large parts of the battle narratives and usually lead to more deaths on both sides, demonstrate the importance ascribed to the immediate retrieval of the dead by the Achaeans and Trojans alike.[19] Removing the dead in the heat of battle ensured both that the corpses were not despoiled by the enemy warriors or scavengers, and that the fallen could receive proper burial, essential for any soul's (*psychē*) successful journey to the underworld. Furthermore, in the case of the poem's princes and leading men—the *aristoi* and the *basileis*—funeral ceremonies provided an essential outlet to express the social status of the deceased and confirm their glory (*kleos*) in the memory of men to come; their scale and grandeur were proportional to the honour (*timē*) that the fallen enjoyed during his life. The funeral rituals, which could stretch over many days and include different elements depending on the status of the deceased, consisted of the washing of the corpse, ritual lamentations and the cutting of mourners' hair, procession, sacrifices, cremation, the erection of a mound and gravestone, ending with a funeral feast, and, for some, games.[20] Taken altogether, the rites performed by the living on behalf of the dead in the Homeric epics are referred to as *geras thanontōn*, or 'the due of the dead' (e.g. *Iliad* 16.457; 23.9; *Odyssey* 24.190).[21] They were regarded as the rightful due of the *aristoi*, whose social status and heroic death in battle granted their special treatment in death. But what about the rest of the poem's warriors? What was the *geras thanontōn* of common, non-elite men in the *Iliad*?

Discerning the post-mortem fate of common warriors in the *Iliad* is not a straightforward task. The narrative focus of the poem is firmly on the *aristoi* and their exploits on and off the battlefield. Although the presence of the masses is implied and acknowledged by the poet throughout, we rarely hear about the lives of the common people in the Achaean camp or in Troy. Their occasional appearances in the narrative do, however, allow us to catch a glimpse of their significance in combat and their standing in the Homeric communities,

19 On fights over the dead, or *Leichenkämpfe*, in the *Iliad*, see Singor 1995:194–196; Van Wees 1996:25–26, 54–56; Kucewicz 2021a:18–30.

20 E.g. Patroclus: 23.127–897; Hector: 24.777–804; Achilles: *Od.* 24.35–94.

21 On the Homeric dead and *geras thanontōn*, see Garland 1982; Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1982; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995:10–140; Eder 2020; Kucewicz 2021a:13–42.

including what happens to their bodies after they die.[22] The scene of special significance in this context is the episode of mass burials of the fallen warriors described in Book 7. Following the first day of the fighting in the *Iliad*, the Trojans decide to send a herald to the Achaeans asking for a peaceful resolution to the conflict and for a truce to collect and dispose of their dead. Rejecting the first request, Agamemnon agrees to the truce, οὐ γάρ τις φειδὼ νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων / γίγνετ', ἐπεί κε θάνωσι, πυρὸς μειλισσέμεν ὦκα 'for there is no sparing time for the bodies of the perished, once they have died, to give them swiftly the pity of burning' (7.409–410). What follows is a lengthy description of how the dead on both sides are dealt with:

ἔνθα διαγνῶναι χαλεπῶς ἦν ἄνδρα ἕκαστον·
ἀλλ' ὕδατι νίζοντες ἄπο βρότον αἱματόεντα,
δάκρυα θερμὰ χέοντες ἀμαξάων ἐπάειραν.
οὐδ' εἴα κλαίειν Πρίαμος μέγας· οἱ δὲ σιωπῇ
νεκροὺς πυρκαϊῆς ἐπενήνεον ἀχνύμενοι κῆρ,
ἐν δὲ πυρὶ πρήσαντες ἔβαν προτὶ Ἴλιον ἱρήν.
ὣς δ' αὖτως ἑτέρωθεν ἐϋκνήμιδες Ἀχαιοὶ
νεκροὺς πυρκαϊῆς ἐπινήνεον ἀχνύμενοι κῆρ,
ἐν δὲ πυρὶ πρήσαντες ἔβαν κοίλας ἐπὶ νῆας.
Ἦμος δ' οὔτ' ἄρ πω ἠώς, ἔτι δ' ἀμφιλύκη νύξ,
τῆμος ἄρ' ἀμφὶ πυρὴν κριτὸς ἔγρετο λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν,
τύμβον δ' ἀμφ' αὐτὴν ἕνα ποίεον ἐξαγαγόντες
ἄκριτον ἐκ πεδίου, ποτὶ δ' αὐτὸν τεῖχος ἔδειμαν
πύργους θ' ὑψηλούς, εἶλαρ νηῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν.

They found it hard to recognize each individual dead man; but with water they washed away the blood that was on them and as they wept warm tears they lifted them on to the wagons. But great Priam would not let them cry out; and in silence they piled the bodies upon the pyre, with their hearts in sorrow, and burned them upon the fire, and went back to sacred Ilion. In the same way on the other side the strong-greaved Achaeans piled their own slain upon the pyre, with their hearts in sorrow, and burned them upon the fire, and went back to their hollow vessels.

But when the dawn was not yet, but still the pallor of night's edge, a chosen body of the Achaeans formed by the pyre; and they gathered

22 For the importance of the masses in Homeric warfare, see Latacz 1977; Pritchett 1985; Raaflaub 2008.

> together and piled one single mound all above it indiscriminately from the plain, and built a fort on it with towered ramparts, to be a defence for themselves and their vessels.
>
> 7.424–437

The account of mass burials in the *Iliad* implies that the corpses of warriors not retrieved in the midst of the fighting were collected, washed, and burned on a funeral pyre at the end of each day. Although the social status of the fallen is not explicitly given by the poet, we should assume that the bodies did not belong to the *aristoi*. The latter, as we already noted, were normally tended to during battle; the differences in the burial ceremonies confirm this further. The only honour given to the dead consists of washing away the blood; otherwise, the haste and the sheer number of bodies to be processed meant that many cannot be recognized, as they are hastily moved in wagons and thrown upon the pyre, where they end up being burned as one, undifferentiated mass. No lamentations are allowed during the burning (Priam explicitly forbids the Trojans from wailing: 7.427); a mound is erected around the pyre, but instead of a gravestone, the Achaeans build a rampart around it, complete with a ditch and a palisade, to protect their camp from future Trojan attacks. In contrast to the funeral ceremonies of the poem's elites, the dead are buried collectively, anonymously, and with minimal ceremonies.

Furthermore, while the burial scene in Book 7 might be taken as the standard custom of Homeric armies to dispose of the masses, this was likely not the case. The episode is, in fact, an exception; no similar truces follow the subsequent days of fighting in the *Iliad*.[23] Even though this absence could be explained by the elite focus of the poem, other instances in which the bodies of common warriors appear in the *Iliad* strongly suggest that the usual practice was to leave the majority of the bodies unburied. This impression is constantly reinforced throughout the poem: the opening lines talk about unburied bodies as food for birds and dogs; *ad hoc* Achaean and Trojan assemblies are held on "clean ground, where there showed a space not cumbered with corpses" (ἐν καθαρῷ, ὅθι δὴ νεκύων διεφαίνετο χῶρος, 8.491; 10.199); some warriors even hide among the corpses in the no man's land during a night raid (10.298, 349). These corpses, one has to conclude, belonged to the common warriors, who lay on the battlefield for an indefinite amount of time, until a rare truce was agreed. When compared to the *geras thanontōn* of the poem's elites, it is therefore notable,

23 The only other mass burial in the poem concerns the cremation of the victims of the plague in Book 1 (1.52), which did not require a truce; we are also not told what happened with the remains of the dead.

as Robert Garland observed, that "Homer's warriors did not see it as their business at the end of a day's fighting to reclaim the bodies of ordinary, common soldiers, even those that were easily recoverable … the normal practice was to leave the dead on the battlefield at the end of a day's fighting."[24]

To sum up, the customs regarding the treatment of the dead warriors in the *Iliad* are not uniform and display notable disparities, both in terms of the retrieval of corpses from the battlefield and their burial. The procedures vary depending on whether the dead are ordinary, rank-and-file troops or members of the elite, the *aristoi*; as Nicole Loraux summarized, "a line divided the anonymous death of ordinary people from the beautiful death of Sarpedon or Patrocles."[25] Even though the poet does not give an explicit explanation for the differences in the post-mortem fates of the fallen, it is clear that they were primarily motivated by socio-political factors. The defining characteristic of the communities depicted in the Homeric epics is their rigid social stratification between the select group of the nobles, who wield all political power and lead men in battle, and the multitude of commoners.[26] Among the most evocative episodes demonstrating this division is the Achaean assembly in Book 2, during which Odysseus speaks to different men around the camp following Agamemnon's morale test of the army, changing his tone based on their social standing:

Ὃν τινα μὲν βασιλῆα καὶ ἔξοχον ἄνδρα κιχείη,
τὸν δ᾽ ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσιν ἐρητύσασκε παραστάς·
"δαιμόνι᾽, οὐ σὲ ἔοικε κακὸν ὣς δειδίσσεσθαι,
ἀλλ᾽ αὐτός τε κάθησο καὶ ἄλλους ἵδρυε λαούς."

Ὃν δ᾽ αὖ δήμου τ᾽ ἄνδρα ἴδοι βοόωντά τ᾽ ἐφεύροι,
τὸν σκήπτρῳ ἐλάσασκεν ὁμοκλήσασκέ τε μύθῳ·
"δαιμόνι᾽, ἀτρέμας ἧσο καὶ ἄλλων μῦθον ἄκουε,
οἳ σέο φέρτεροί εἰσι, σὺ δ᾽ ἀπτόλεμος καὶ ἄναλκις,
οὔτε ποτ᾽ ἐν πολέμῳ ἐναρίθμιος οὔτ᾽ ἐνὶ βουλῇ.
οὐ μέν πως πάντες βασιλεύσομεν ἐνθάδ᾽ Ἀχαιοί …"

Whatever king or a man of note he met, to his side he would come and with gentle words seek to restrain him, saying: "It is not right, man, to frighten you as if you were a coward, but sit down yourself, and make the

24 Garland 1982:70 and 73.

25 Loraux 2018:79–80.

26 For recent scholarship on Homeric society, see Osborne 2004; Ulf 2009; Rose 2012:93–165; Crielaard 2020; Kucewicz 2021a:15–18.

> rest of your people sit …" But whatever man of the people he saw, and found brawling, him he would drive off with his staff, and rebuke with words, saying: "Sit still, man, and listen to the words of others who are better men than you; you are unwarlike and lacking in valour, to be counted neither in war nor in counsel. In no way will we Achaeans all be kings here …"
>
> 2.188–203[27]

Moments later, Odysseus famously rebukes and strikes Thersites for arguing and standing up against the princes (2.243–277). The social rift between the Homeric nobles and the multitudes is also commented upon by other heroes in the poem as they address their men during battle (e.g. 12.265–272; 15.295–299); and the poem's narrator, who in the account of Hector's *aristeia* first lists the names of his victims, adding that Hector "killed these, who were the lords of the Danaäns, and thereafter the multitude" (τοὺς ἄρ᾽ ὅ γ᾽ ἡγεμόνας Δαναῶν ἕλεν, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα / πληθύν, 11.304–305). These and other similar passages throughout the *Iliad* demonstrate that what happened to the bodies of warriors in death was strongly determined by their social standing in their communities.[28] The world of the Homeric war dead, in other words, paralleled the social divisions of the world of the living.

This conclusion, in turn, brings us very firmly into the realm of necropolitics. The retrieval, burial, and commemoration of the dead killed in armed conflicts, as we saw in Bargu's model, provide some of the key areas for sovereignties to assert political power and demarcate social boundaries among the living. The typical necropolitical modalities of "the delay, interruption or suspension of the conduct of funerary rituals, the imposition of mass or anonymous interment" appear to be all at play in the Achaean and Trojan armies in the *Iliad*. Although their socio-political significance is never made explicit by the poet, it is clear that these forms of violence are associated solely with the dead who belonged to the socially disadvantaged classes fighting in the Homeric armies, referred to as the multitude (*plēthos*), or, simply, the people (*dēmos*, *laoi*).[29] Furthermore, the social chasm between the latter and the elites is arguably most

27 Translation by A.T. Murray, revised by W.F. Wyatt (2003).

28 Suggested also by Garland 1982; Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1982; Loraux 2018; Eder 2020. Cf. Syrkou in this volume on considerations of social status in inflicting torture and punishments in antiquity.

29 The exception to this is threats of exposure and mutilation issued by the *aristoi* to their enemy 'social equivalents', which I briefly discuss below. On the *laoi* in Homer, see Haubold 2000; Hammer 2002:144–169.

strongly expressed throughout the poem in what happened to a warrior upon his death: for some, there was immediate retrieval followed by a conspicuous and individual burial; for others, there was initial exposure on the battlefield and, eventually, mass and anonymous interment.[30] Whether this was a conscious and deliberate necropolitical strategy on behalf of the Homeric elites, used to subjugate the masses and reinforce the social hierarchies depicted in the poem, is inevitably more debatable. What is clear, however, is that the *aristoi* were in full control of the burial arrangements for the rank-and-file dead in their armies. It was they who negotiated and arranged the occasional truces to collect and bury the corpses left on the battlefield. And, more importantly, it was also them who had the power to withdraw the right of burial altogether.[31]

The theme of deliberate exposure, accompanied by mutilation by scavenging animals, appears on numerous occasions throughout the *Iliad*, providing a stereotyped synonym for a warrior's death in battle.[32] There are many ways in which the motif of denying burial is brought up in the poem. By far the most common is through individual taunts directed at one's opponent in combat, issued to terrify the enemy and boast over fallen victims: e.g. ἀτὰρ Τρώων κορέεις κύνας ἠδ᾽ οἰωνοὺς / δημῷ καὶ σάρκεσσι 'you will glut the dogs and birds of the Trojans with fat and flesh' (13.831–832); σὲ μὲν κύνες ἠδ᾽ οἰωνοὶ / ἑλκήσουσ᾽ ἀικῶς 'on you the dogs and the vultures shall feed and foully rip you' (22.335–336). The prospect of being left unburied and mangled by scavengers was a particularly gruesome one for the poem's elites, for whom proper burial was not only their rightful due but also an essential means for achieving the 'imperishable glory' (*kleos aphthiton*) that came with a heroic death in battle.[33] Denying burial to a Homeric *aristos* annihilated the social status of the deceased and consigned the memory of his life to oblivion, effectively reducing him to the status of a worthless commoner.[34] As a result, the numerous threats of exposure and animal

30 Next to the Achaean assembly episode, the social differences apparent in the treatment of the war dead provide our strongest and most consistent evidence for the radical social stratification of the Homeric society. They effectively undermine the argument of scholars who argued against the 'class-division' model but did not consider the issue of burial: e.g. Calhoun 1934; Geddes 1984; Rihll 1986; Donlan 1991:1–34.

31 Cf. the denial of burial to Ajax by Agamemnon and Menelaus in Sophocles' *Ajax*, on which see Karakantza in this volume.

32 On deliberate exposure and animal mutilation in the *Iliad*, see Redfield 1975:168–169, 183–186, and 199–200; Vermeule 1979:103–112; Kucewicz 2016; and Kucewicz 2021a:37–39.

33 Hence the importance of the concession to return the body of the vanquished in arranged duels: e.g. 7.76–86.

34 On the 'beautiful death' and its sinister obverse, 'the antifuneral', see Redfield 1975:168–169; Vernant 1991.

mutilation in the *Iliad* feature almost exclusively in the battlefield exchanges between the opposing *aristoi*, forming part and parcel of Homeric psychological warfare. Considering their frequent occurrence, it is nonetheless striking that these threats are never fulfilled in the poem. The bodies of the fallen *aristoi* are always retrieved by their comrades during battle; in the exceptional cases when mortals fail in their obligation, the gods protect the dead and ensure that their *geras thanontōn* is granted.[35] The humiliation associated with exposure and animal mutilation is, therefore, firmly reserved for the common dead in the *Iliad*.

In addition to taunting enemy warriors, threats to deny burial are also occasionally issued by the Homeric *aristoi* to their own troops.[36] These, although less numerous, are more interesting in the context of our investigation as they testify to the absolute power of the poem's elites over the post-mortem treatment of the masses. Apart from their individual martial exploits, which dominate the combat scenes of the *Iliad*, Homeric *aristoi* command large groups of men in battle; leadership consists of a mix of positive exhortations and coercive discipline, as demonstrated, for instance, in the episode of the Achaean assembly.[37] In some cases, imposing discipline takes the form of death threats for insubordinate or cowardly warriors (e.g. 2.357–359; 12.248–250; 13.232–234). The ultimate means of punishment at the disposal of Homeric commanders, however, was death *and* exposure. Agamemnon, addressing the Achaean army in the aftermath of the assembly, issues a warning that

> ὃν δέ κ᾽ ἐγὼν ἀπάνευθε μάχης ἐθέλοντα νοήσω
> μιμνάζειν παρὰ νηυσὶ κορωνίσιν, οὔ οἱ ἔπειτα
> ἄρκιον ἐσσεῖται φυγέειν κύνας ἠδ᾽ οἰωνούς.
>
> any man whom I find trying, apart from the battle, to hang back by the curved ships, for him no longer will there by any means to escape the dogs and the vultures.
>
> 2.391–393

35 E.g. Sarpedon: 16.667–675; Hector: 23.185–187; 24.18–21. The only exception is Asteropaios, killed and exposed in the river Skamandros by Achilles (21.200–204).

36 The other way in which the theme of exposure and mutilation by scavengers is brought up in the *Iliad* concerns lamenting one's future or the fate of one's relatives: e.g. 22.66–67; 22.508–511; 24.211.

37 On Homeric generalship, see Kucewicz 2022. On exhortations, see Latacz 1977, esp. 246–250.

Hector makes the threat even more explicit while shouting orders to his troops during the Trojan attack on the Achaean ships:

> νηυσὶν ἐπισσεύεσθαι, ἐᾶν δ᾽ ἔναρα βροτόεντα·
> ὃν δ᾽ ἂν ἐγὼν ἀπάνευθε νεῶν ἐτέρωθι νοήσω,
> αὐτοῦ οἱ θάνατον μητίσομαι, οὐδέ νυ τόν γε
> γνωτοί τε γνωταί τε πυρὸς λελάχωσι θανόντα,
> ἀλλὰ κύνες ἐρύουσι πρὸ ἄστεος ἡμετέροιο.
>
> Make hard for the ships, let the bloody spoils be. That man I see in the other direction apart from the vessels, I will take care that he gets his death, and that man's relations neither men nor women shall give his dead body the rite of burning. In the space before our city the dogs shall tear him to pieces.
>
> 15.347–351

Being denied burial and thrown to the dogs in front of the city embodies the height of horror and humiliation for any Homeric warrior, elite or otherwise.[38] Even though such threats are directed at large groups of men ("any man"), which, in theory, includes the multitudes and the *aristoi*, it is clear that the target for both Agamemnon and Hector in these passages is predominantly, if not exclusively, the masses.[39] Enforcing orders on fellow *aristoi* is a slippery slope in the social world of the *Iliad*, which can lead to disastrous consequences—the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles providing the obvious example. Throughout the poem, the norm for ordering the elites in the Homeric armies consists of polite encouragements and respectful exhortations. The few instances of coercive discipline in the form of threats of exposure

38 Since earlier in the poem Nestor also addresses the Achaeans in a similar situation without using threats of death and exposure (6.66–71), Segal 1971:19 argued that the extreme tone of Hector's words shows the extent to which the Trojan prince was overcome by the war's intoxicating savagery. Cf. Janko 1994:264–265.

39 The other example of exposure used in an exhortation concerns the personal exchange between Poseidon, who takes on the voice of Thoas, urging Idomeneus into battle:

> Ἰδομενεῦ, μὴ κεῖνος ἀνὴρ ἔτι νοστήσειεν
> ἐκ Τροίης, ἀλλ᾽ αὖθι κυνῶν μέλπηθρα γένοιτο,
> ὅς τις ἐπ᾽ ἤματι τῷδε ἑκὼν μεθίῃσι μάχεσθαι.
> Idomeneus, may that man (*anēr*) who this day wilfully hangs back from the fighting never win home again out of Troy land, but stay here and be made dogs' delight for their feasting.
>
> 13.232–234

Again, the threat is general in nature and does not refer to Idomeneus specifically.

should be therefore interpreted as aimed at the rank-and-file warriors. Considering the lack of any formal obligations for the masses to obey orders in battle, fear and intimidation provide one factor that keeps the armies together.[40] Its efficacy, in turn, is principally rooted in the social hierarchies of the Homeric communities. Being part of this dynamic, threats of denying burial issued to one's own troops are used as a disciplinary tool by the *aristoi* to keep the masses in line and to assert their authority on the battlefield. Although they are relatively rare in the poem, they can be seen as a deliberate strategy to control the socially disadvantaged multitudes, giving us one example of necropolitics at play in the Homeric armies.

The politics of death of the *Iliad*, we may conclude, offer a mirror reflection of the politics of the living enshrined in the poem. The rigid social division between the handful of *aristoi* and the masses of commoners in the Homeric communities finds its strongest expression in the customs associated with the dead, their recovery from the battlefield, funerary ceremonies and burial. As some warriors are glorified and remembered in death, others are exposed, mutilated by scavengers, and forgotten. This inequality, although rarely commented upon by the poet, manifests itself further in the tools of coercive discipline employed by the commanders in the Achaean and Trojan armies. Threats of death and exposure, used to enforce obedience and reassert prevailing sociopolitical hierarchies, testify to the full control of the elites over what happens to the bodies of fallen warriors, while also providing our best instances of necropolitical modes of violence in the *Iliad*. But did the mythical necropolitics of the poem have any basis in the historical realities of early Greek armies?

4 War Burials and Necropolitics in Early Greece

Answering any questions regarding the historicity of the *Iliad* and the communities depicted in the poem is never an easy task. The Homeric epics are generally assumed to have reached their final written form no later than the mid-seventh century BCE. Although their narratives are set in the mythical past, the fictional worlds of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* hold many resemblances to the historical realities of the Greek *poleis* of the Archaic era, as storytellers tailored their songs to the value systems and expectations of their audiences. At the same time, the epics include concepts and items that clearly predate the

40 The others are personal obligation and comradeship. On recruitment, organization, and discipline in Homeric armies, see Van Wees 1986; Van Wees 1996; Van Wees 1997:669–673; Kucewicz 2022:10–16.

Archaic period, thus reflecting the long oral tradition behind their creation.[41] The resulting combination of different (often historically incompatible) elements makes the *Iliad* notoriously difficult to work with, but, considering the dearth of written evidence for the 7th century BCE, it does remain our richest literary source for funerary customs and warfare in early Greece.[42] In order to determine whether the necropolitical modes of violence associated with the treatment of the Homeric war dead echoed similar practices of the Archaic era, our best and only evidence consists of war burials. If burial for fallen warriors differed based on their social standing, as it does in the hierarchical model manifested in the epics, then we can reasonably assume that Homeric necropolitics could have been based on the socio-political dynamics governing Archaic armies. But does the surviving evidence for pre-Classical war graves confirm this pattern?

Beginning with the burial for the masses, described in Book 7 of the *Iliad*, we would expect to find similar evidence of mass warrior graves (*polyandria*) located on or close to battlefields.[43] Burying the dead collectively, on the spot, was a standard custom for many Greek armies in the Classical era, as confirmed in both the literary sources and the archaeological record.[44] Examples of earlier *polyandria*, however, are few and far between. The most notable are the two mass burials from Paroikia on Paros, dated to the late-eighth century BCE. They contained a large number of Late Geometric vases in which the cremated remains of 118 men were interred. The number of the deceased, along with their age range (ca. 16–60 years old), skeletal trauma, and the presence of fragmented iron weapons, all indicate that the men were casualties of war. Their common burial in the city's cemetery suggests, furthermore, that the *polyandria* were likely built at public expense by the local community wishing to commemorate its fallen citizens.[45] The example of the Parian *polyandria*, in turn, has led some scholars to assume that the custom of public battlefield graves, which

41 On the date and making of the *Iliad*, see West 2011.

42 For the historicity of Homeric burial customs, see Vermeule 1979; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995:108–140; Walter-Karydi 2015:17–48. For warfare, see Van Wees 2004:249–252; Schwartz 2009:105–115; Kagan and Viggiano 2013:44–49.

43 It has to be noted that the authenticity of the mass burial scene in the *Iliad* has been doubted by some scholars who suggested that the entire episode was a later, Classical addition to the poem: Page 1963:315–324; Garland 1982:73. Cf. West 1969; Kucewicz 2021a:30–34.

44 For an exhaustive survey of literary and archaeological evidence, see Pritchett 1985:94–259.

45 On the Parian *polyandria*, see Agelarakis 2017; Lloyd 2018; Lloyd 2021:40. Agelarakis' claim that the *polyandria* document that "*patrios nomos* was respectfully sanctioned at Paros" (p. 198) is far-fetched.

contained bodies of all fallen warriors with little or no distinction of their social status, provided the norm for the majority of war burials in the Archaic era.[46] This assumption, however, is highly problematic. The only other remains of a pre-Classical *polyandrion* is a late-seventh-century BCE pit burial from Akragas in Sicily, which contained dozens of corpses and over 150 Greek vases.[47] No other clearly identifiable Archaic *polyandria* have been found in the Greek world yet. While this seeming absence cannot be taken as an argument for their non-existence, especially taking into account the remarkable *polyandria* from Paros, it may imply that the archaeological invisibility of such burials was due to their hasty character and relative unimportance, not dissimilar to the mass graves featured in the *Iliad*.

The lack of examples of *polyandrion* burials in the archaeological record for pre-Classical Greece is further accentuated by the existing evidence for individual burials for fallen warriors. The majority of them come from sixth-century BCE Attica, though earlier, seventh-century BCE examples have also been suggested.[48] Archaic funerary monuments in Attica consisted of either painted relief *stēlai*, or statues of naked youths (*kouroi*/*korai*), which marked the graves of individual deceased. Since military attributes feature heavily on many of the monuments, most scholars suspect that some of them would have commemorated men who died in battle.[49] This assumption is further confirmed by epitaphs inscribed on their bases: "Stay and take pity by the marker of dead Kroisos, whom once in the front ranks destroyed raging Ares" (*CEG* 27); "Let each man, whether a citizen or foreigner coming from abroad, pass by only after mourning Tettichos, a good man, who perished in war and lost his

46 E.g. Bergmann 2019. In the absence of archaeological remains for early *polyandria*, the most commonly cited evidence for the practice consists of the much later account of Pausanias (2nd century CE), who himself relied on third-century BCE sources which tend to project (often blatantly) post-battle conventions of their own time to earlier eras. For more on memorials of war, including *polyandria*, in Pausanias, see Roy 2019.

47 Kurtz and Boardman 1971:257; Pritchett 1985:126; Lloyd 2021:40. The famous Marathon *soros*, which contained the remains of the Athenians who died in 490 BCE, was likely incorporated into an earlier tomb, which may or may not have been a *polyandrion*: Whitley 1994; Braun 2021:37–123.

48 One candidate is a seventh-century BCE pit grave in the Kerameikos; it consisted of three bronze urns containing the ashes of three men. Doronzio 2018:115 and 144 speculated that "the fact that the individuals were interred at the same time could indicate that they perished because of a single event, for example as casualties of a single battle, maybe not in Athens … the corpses were cremated elsewhere and the ashes transported to Athens."

49 E.g. Sourvinou-Inwood 1995:221–297; Arrington 2015:19–32; Kucewicz 2021a:101–117. For helmeted *kouroi*, see D'Onofrio 2020:169–172.

tender youth" (*CEG* 13).[50] The cost and grandeur of such monuments indicate that the deceased belonged to wealthy families, who repatriated their bodies for private funeral ceremonies and burial at home.[51] Although the bulk of our evidence for private repatriation of the war dead comes from Archaic Athens, a similar system was likely also in place in pre-550 BCE Sparta—as implied in a fragment of Tyrtaeus (12.23–34) and recent archaeological survey studies—and possibly other Archaic *poleis*.[52] What all of this suggests is that some men who died fighting in Archaic armies were not interred *en masse* on the battlefield but brought back home for individual burials. The expense of the latter process, in addition to the cost of commissioning a funerary monument, meant that repatriation was available only to the wealthiest. While we cannot estimate how many received such treatment in death, it certainly constituted a special privilege, reminiscent of the *geras thanontōn* of the Homeric *aristoi*.

One way to explain the absence of mass graves and the comparative abundance of private burials for the war dead is to argue that Archaic armies were comprised of small war bands, led and populated by local elites. Early Greek warfare, according to this view, consisted of small-scale raids carried out mostly, if not exclusively, by aristocratic warriors, operating largely outside public control.[53] The small-scale character of such war bands meant that casualties were small and burial was organized by private means. This notion of decentralized warfare would explain the lack of pre-Classical *polyandria* but it ignores the presence of non-elite combatants in Archaic militias. The mass of 'commoners', as we saw, played an important part in Homeric warfare and there is good evidence to suspect that most seventh- and sixth-century BCE armed forces in Greece did include sizeable numbers of men unable to afford hoplite equipment; the latter served as light-armed infantry, traditionally associated in our sources with the lower socio-economic classes, or retainers to heavy-armed warriors.[54] The question is, therefore, what happened to their bodies upon death in combat?

Based on the battle accounts of the *Iliad*, the bodies of non-elite fallen could conceivably have been left on the battlefield. The motif of scavengers feasting on the corpses of the dead has a long history in the Egyptian and Near Eastern art (explaining its prevalence in the Homeric epics) and scenes of birds of prey

50 For these and other examples, see Tentori Montalto 2017.

51 As argued, for instance, by Arrington 2015:19–32; Walter-Karydi 2015:106–108 and 170; Kucewicz 2021a:101–117. *Contra* Bergmann 2019:116–117; Rees 2022:124–126.

52 Kucewicz 2021b; and Kucewicz *forthcoming*.

53 E.g. Gabrielsen 2007:250–253; Pritchard 2010:7–15; Brouwers 2013:72–103.

54 Kucewicz, Lloyd, and Konijnendijk 2021.

feeding on the war dead appear also in the eighth- and seventh-century BCE Cycladic iconography, suggesting that unburied bodies on battlefields were not an uncommon sight.[55] Considering the lack of any evidence, written or material, for what happened to the war dead whose bodies were not brought back home, the most plausible theory is that they would have been buried in the most efficient and cost-effective way, i.e. interred, *en masse*, on the spot, in archaeologically invisible ways. This, inevitably, relies on a heavy dose of generalization, as practice may have differed from one *polis* to another, depending on a number of factors, such as the city's *politeia* 'political constitution' and the specific character of its armed forces. The importance of the diversity with respect to how and where the war dead were buried cannot be overstated: some *poleis* might have buried their fallen collectively in public tombs from an early date onwards (e.g. Parian *polyandria*); others might have consigned the business of war entirely into the hands of local elites. On balance, however, it does seem clear that the socio-political differences in the treatment of elite and common war dead throughout the Archaic era were far closer to the hierarchical standards enshrined in the *Iliad* than to the egalitarian norms known from the Classical period. The resulting inequality in death would have provided the necessary ground for potential exploitation of (non-)burial as a necropolitical strategy in the context of war but, beyond the *Iliad*, our sources on the matter remain silent.

This conclusion does not give us a definite answer as to whether the necropolitics depicted in the *Iliad* were drawn from real-life practices of early Greek societies. The question will remain a matter of debate; further discoveries might, and hopefully will, bring new evidence to the table. The investigation here, nonetheless, has shone some new light on the relationship of dead bodies—their management, interment, and commemoration—to the socio-political structures of sovereign power enshrined in the *Iliad*. Applying the lens of necropolitics to the poem offers a different way to look at the deep-rooted dynamics of social division in Homeric society and how these affected the channels of leadership and discipline in the Achaean and Trojan armies. As such, it is hoped that it will encourage more studies on necropolitical modes of violence both in the mythical worlds of epic poetry and the historical worlds which inspired them.

55 See Caskey 1976:24–25; Vermeule 1979:46–48 and 103–104; Walter-Karydi 2015:45–46.

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CHAPTER 3

Odysseus' Corpses: Necropolitics and Homer's *Odyssey*

Jesse Weiner

1 Introduction

Per Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides … in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die."[1] This expression of sovereign power over human bodies extends beyond death to include control over corpses and their rights to be mourned, interred, and treated with culturally appropriate forms of respect. Such imposition of political power over the dead reaches back to Homer with Achilles' abuse (and later return) of Hector's body in the *Iliad*. And, later, Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Antigone* revolve around disputes about sovereignty over funerary rites. As Andrew M. McClellan observes, "[t]he use of corpse mistreatment as a form of staged psychological warfare is not a modern phenomenon."[2] Taking Homer as an origin for necropolitics in Greek literature, I here read Odysseus' and Telemachus' purge of the suitors, slave women, and Melanthius in *Odyssey* 22 as an expression of biopower and their treatment of corpses as a necropolitical claim to sovereignty. To define terms at the outset, I treat biopolitics and biopower as the sovereign right to make or take life, as laid out by Michel Foucault in the 1970s and developed more recently by Giorgio Agamben's influential *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.[3] We might think of Mbembe's necropolitics as a subset of biopolitics, focused specifically on the politics surrounding death and dead bodies.

In stark contrast to the effort and care Odysseus earlier takes to perform funeral rights for Elpenor, the bodies of the suitors and Odysseus' maligned

1 Mbembe 2003:11. I presented early versions of this chapter at the 2021 International Conference in Classics and Ancient History hosted in Portugal by the Universidade de Coimbra, as well as at the 2021 meeting of the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association in Las Vegas, NV. I am grateful for the feedback I received on each occasion. Thanks are also due to Andrew M. McClellan, whose comments on my initial abstract helped shape the essay.

2 McClellan 2019:3. See also Kucewicz and Karakantza in this volume.

3 Foucault 2003 and Agamben 1998.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_004

slaves receive considerably less respect. The suitors' bodies are abandoned outside for reclamation if and when word reaches a loved one, Melanthius is mutilated, and, in my reading, the fate of the domestic slaves prefigures the reflections of Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben on concentration camps. For Arendt, such spaces are "laboratories," as it were, "in the experiment of total domination" leading to a "disintegration of personality."[4] For Agamben, these places where inhumanity is taken to the extreme blur distinctions between life and death.[5] Within the biopolitical order, the paradox of sovereignty extends to slavery: much as the sovereign operates both within and above the law, slaves are inscribed within the law yet excluded from political life.[6] At play, I argue, is not only vengeance but also an emphatic political performance as Odysseus reclaims his kingship and his *oikos* (and I equate some aspects of Odysseus' *oikos* with Mbembe's colony).[7] To adapt Walter Burkert's thoughts on the dynamics of ancient sacrificial rites, "killing … makes us conscious of the new order and brings it to power."[8]

2 The Positive Paradigm: How to Treat a Loyal Corpse

Over the course of his *apologoi* (*Odyssey* 9–12), Odysseus explains the loss of each and every one of his comrades. Odysseus repeatedly claims to have grieved for the dead men, but scant attention is paid to their bodies, perhaps understandably, as most are irretrievable. However, Elpenor's corpse remains above ground and, as internal narrator, Odysseus does give it detailed attention. In what I read as a flexing of sovereign power and class hierarchies, Odysseus confesses that he did not initially find burial for Elpenor sufficiently important to demand his attention:[9]

4 Arendt 1950:60. Cf. Arendt 1950:55: "The extermination camps appear within the framework of totalitarian terror as the most extreme form of concentration camps. Extermination happens to human beings who for all practical purposes are already 'dead'."

5 Agamben 1998:114: "The Jew living under Nazism is the privileged negative referent of the new biopolitical sovereignty and is, as such, a flagrant case of a *homo sacer* in the sense of a life that can be killed but not sacrificed." Also Agamben 1998: "The camp is merely the place in which the most absolute *conditio inhumana* that has ever existed on earth was realized" (166), a place of exception that blurs distinctions "between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer make any sense" (170).

6 Cf. Mbembe 2003:21.

7 Mbembe 2019:5.

8 Burkert 1983:40.

9 As Ahl and Roisman 1996:123 note, "Elpenor is marked by Odysseus as a man neither very

πρώτη δὲ ψυχὴ Ἐλπήνορος ἦλθεν ἑταίρου·
οὐ γάρ πω ἐτέθαπτο ὑπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης·
σῶμα γὰρ ἐν Κίρκης μεγάρῳ κατελείπομεν ἡμεῖς
ἄκλαυτον καὶ ἄθαπτον, ἐπεὶ πόνος ἄλλος ἔπειγε.

First came the spirit of my man Elpenor, who had not yet been buried in the earth. We left his body in the house of Circe without a funeral or burial; we were too preoccupied with other things.

Odyssey 11.51–54

But Elpenor's shade-in-limbo pleads: "My lord, I beg you to remember me. Do not go on and leave me there unburied, abandoned, without tears of lamentation," and Elpenor goes on to specify how his corpse should be treated and mourned:

ἔνθα σ᾽ ἔπειτα, ἄναξ, κέλομαι μνήσασθαι ἐμεῖο.
μή μ᾽ ἄκλαυτον ἄθαπτον ἰὼν ὄπιθεν καταλείπειν
νοσφισθείς, μή τοί τι θεῶν μήνιμα γένωμαι,
ἀλλά με κακκῆαι σὺν τεύχεσιν, ἅσσα μοι ἔστιν,
σῆμά τέ μοι χεῦαι πολιῆς ἐπὶ θινὶ θαλάσσης,
ἀνδρὸς δυστήνοιο καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι.
ταῦτά τέ μοι τελέσαι πῆξαί τ᾽ ἐπὶ τύμβῳ ἐρετμόν,
τῷ καὶ ζωὸς ἔρεσσον ἐὼν μετ᾽ ἐμοῖς ἑτάροισιν.

When you're there [Aeaea], my lord, I beg you to remember me. Do not go on and leave me there unburied, abandoned, without tears or lamentation—or you will make the gods enraged at you. Burn me with all my arms, and heap a mound beside the grey salt sea so in the future people will know of my misfortune. And fix into the tomb the oar I used to row with my companions while I lived.

Odyssey 11.71–78

Importantly, Elpenor grounds his plea in political subservience, addressing Odysseus as *anax* (11.71), thereby framing the relationship as one of sovereign/subject or even master/slave. Odysseus assents, simply saying: "Poor man, I will perform and do all these things" (ταῦτά τοι, ὦ δύστηνε, τελευτήσω τε καὶ

courageous in battle nor of sound understanding (10.552–553)." Translations are adapted (into prose) from Wilson 2020. On necropolitics in Homer, see also Kucewicz in this volume.

ἔρξω, 11.80). And Odysseus, the great liar, claims at least that he did in fact return to Aeaea and fulfil Elpenor's wishes (12.8–15). I suggest, tentatively, that we might read a structural connection between the attention given to Elpenor's corpse in Book 11 and that given (or not) eleven books later to the victims of the slaughter of Book 22. But even if this symmetry is coincidental, Odysseus as sovereign decides that his loyal and submissive subject's body warrants full burial rites. In contrast, Odysseus orders that the corpses of the suitors—many of whom are, importantly, non-residents of Ithaca (prefiguring conceptions of non-citizenship)—be heaped outside the palace and left to rot or be reclaimed by relatives. And, of course, the poet meditates in the same book over the executions and bodily abuses done to Odysseus' slaves deemed to have been disloyal. The rest of this essay will focus on Book 22 and its aftermath.

3 A Foil: Reading through Combat Trauma

I have long found the slaughter of the slave women and the mutilation of Melanthius the most uncomfortable passage I have read in Greek literature. Frederick Ahl and Hanna Roisman describe it as a "crescendo of cruelty."[10] And, while I find the episode no less uncomfortable, I now believe I have previously misread it. Drawing on Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam* and its sequel, *Odysseus in America*, Bryan Doerries's *Theater of War*, David J. Morris's 'biography' of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as a staged reading of scenes drawn from Homer and Greek tragedy which I hosted with the Aquila Theatre and Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives, I have in the past taught Odysseus' slaughter of the slave women and mutilation of Melanthius through the lens of combat trauma.[11] As a 'new Achilles' in his *aristeia*,[12] Odysseus enters a 'berserker' state in which he is capable of the most extreme and unimaginable violence and cruelty, and has not yet come down from it once he has completed dispatching the suitors. Shay links his term 'berserk', drawn from Norse to describe "frenzied warriors … in a godlike or god-possessed—but also

10 Ahl and Roisman 1996:256.

11 Shay 1994; Shay 2002; Morris 2015:74; Doerries 2015. Cf. McHardy 2008:35 on Shay's evaluation of Odysseus as a poor leader. Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives was a National Endowment for the Humanities funded project, led by Peter Meineck in partnership with the Aquila Theatre, also founded by Meineck, and which remains active. The project's tour presented public-facing staged readings of Homer and Greek tragedy, with a scholar introducing/framing the scenes and facilitating discussion. Joel Christensen 2020:203–237 suggests that the people of Ithaca, including the suitors, also suffer from collective trauma.

12 Bakker 2013:134, 151.

beastlike—fury," with Homeric *aristeia*. Shay notes that "a soldier who routs the enemy single-handedly is often in the grip of a special state of mind, body, and social disconnection at the time of his memorable deeds. Such men, often branded by their commanders as 'the best', have been honored as heroes."[13] In Egbert J. Bakker's view, Odysseus' "gain-seeking impulses of *mētis* have given way to the implacable, destructive forces of heroic wrath."[14] And there may be something to this reading, especially given the imagery of Eurycleia exulting after finding Odysseus spattered in blood like a lion feeding on an ox:

εὗρεν ἔπειτ᾽ Ὀδυσῆα μετὰ κταμένοισι νέκυσσιν,
αἵματι καὶ λύθρῳ πεπαλαγμένον ὥστε λέοντα,
ὅς ῥά τε βεβρωκὼς βοὸς ἔρχεται ἀγραύλοιο:
πᾶν δ᾽ ἄρα οἱ στῆθός τε παρήϊά τ᾽ ἀμφοτέρωθεν
405 αἱματόεντα πέλει, δεινὸς δ᾽ εἰς ὦπα ἰδέσθαι·
ὣς Ὀδυσεὺς πεπάλακτο πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὕπερθεν.
ἡ δ᾽ ὡς οὖν νέκυάς τε καὶ ἄσπετον εἴσιδεν αἷμα,
ἴθυσέν ῥ᾽ ὀλολύξαι, ἐπεὶ μέγα εἴσιδεν ἔργον·

Among the corpses of the slaughtered men she saw Odysseus all smeared with blood. After a lion eats a grazing ox, its chest and jowls are thick with blood all over; a dreadful sight. Just so, Odysseus had blood all over him—from hands to feet. Seeing the corpses, seeing all that blood, so great a deed of violence, she began to raise cries of exultation.

Odyssey 22.401–408

Likewise, only Zeus' lightning bolt can check Odysseus' bloodlust to prevent the near-civil war of Book 24 (539–544).[15] And Melanthius' mutilation is conducted with wrath (κεκοτηότι θυμῷ, 22.477), emphasizing the emotion driving the act. Fidel Fajardo-Acosta, for example, finds the deaths of the slaves "mindless cruelty."[16]

13 Shay 1994:77.

14 Bakker 2013:152.

15 Myrsiades 2019:256 notes that the simile does not so much evoke Odysseus heroic stature but rather "the savagery that humans are capable of." Cf. Bakker 2013:131 on the divine intervention needed to stop Odysseus' rage at 24.537–540. For Rubino 2005:427, Odysseus is a "ruthless killer."

16 Farjardo-Acosta 1990:136, also cited in Fulkerson 2002:335. Christensen 2020:160n24 notes, drawing on Thalmann's overview (1988:24), that "not everyone agrees that the term 'slave' applies to these women."

4 Making Political Points with Dead Bodies: The Suitors, Sovereignty, and a Case for 'Clear-Minded Odysseus'

Rage and vengeance are indeed present and important to these episodes. However, as Fiona McHardy notes of the Homeric epics, "revenge often appears" as a key motive for violence, but "other reasons are involved as well. Both Odysseus and Achilles claim to be acting in order to take revenge for their companions, but it is clear that they also act for themselves to prove that they are not weak and that they are worthy of honour and leadership."[17] Several epithets and stock phrases throughout the *aristeia*-esque episode and its aftermath compromise my earlier reading of Odysseus' bloodlust. Although common throughout the epic, these epithets and phrases emphasize that each act of violence is a calculated decision. The very first line of Book 22 re-identifies Odysseus as *polymētis* 'many-wiled' as he springs into action (αὐτὰρ ὁ γυμνώθη ῥακέων πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς 'Then many-wiled Odysseus ripped off his rags', 22.1), and the epithet is repeated throughout the battle (22.34, 22.60, 22.105, 22.170, 22.320, 22.371), when he hatches his plan to execute the slave women (22.390, 22.430), and when he purges the hall of *miasma* 'pollution' from the slaughter (22.490). In each instance, the epithet introduces dialogue spoken by Odysseus and emphasizes his clear state of mind and the intention behind his words. Similarly, the poet calls Odysseus "prudent, many-wiled" (δαΐφρονα ποικιλομήτην) three times during the battle with the suitors ('competent, sharp-eyed' in Wilson's translation; 22.115, 22.202, 22.281).

To this end, when Telemachus disobeys Odysseus to begin executing the slave women by hanging rather than with the sword, his cognitive lucidity is emphasized by πεπνυμένος 'wise', 'conscious' at 22.461. Moreover, the phrase ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα 'He spoke winged words', is repeated throughout Book 22 and is attributed to Odysseus responding deliberately during the battle with the suitors (22.150), when he bids Eurycleia fetch the disloyal female slaves (22.410), and when he orders Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Philoetius to have the slave women remove the corpses and then to execute the women (22.436). During the battle with the suitors, this stock phrase is also attributed to Telemachus hatching a strategic plan (22.100); and, later, to Leoides the soothsayer (22.311), Phemius the bard (22.343), and Medon the herald (22.366)—each begging for mercy and all three by profession skilled with words. In short, formulaic though these phrases and epithets might be, the Homeric poet emphasizes the wisdom of Odysseus and Telemachus and their cognitive faculties throughout the viol-

17 McHardy 2008:37.

ence. By contrast, Eurycleia's impulsive speech is "unwinged" (ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος, 22.398), and Ranier Friedrich regards Odysseus' forgoing of "the customary *euchos* and triumphing over a slain enemy (413–416)" as evidence that he has become "well-integrated"—able to exercise mental "control over conflicting passions and motives"—even more so than earlier in the epic.[18] Thus, common though these epithets and phrases are throughout the epic, they suggest that Odysseus is as careful and thoughtful as ever in his speech and actions throughout Book 22. Whatever vengeance and emotional catharsis might fuel the executions, every decision and every act is made and performed with a purpose.

Rather than the unhinged cruelty of a warrior in berserker mode and the explosion of pent-up wrath of delayed vengeance, I suggest that the methodical violence and its aftermath represents a necropolitical claim to sovereignty and that Odysseus' treatment of bodies reinforces the social hierarchy. As McHardy notes, "Odysseus' strong response to the suitors and their relatives seems to be calculated as a method of firmly re-establishing himself as the leading figure on the island" and of deterring any future insurrections against his house.[19]

Mbembe's necropolitics begins with the presuppositions that politics is the "work of death," and sovereignty is "defined as the right to kill."[20] Focalization on this entitlement marks Odysseus' reclamation of his kingship and *oikos*. Throughout battle with the suitors, the violence is interrupted by negotiations over life and death, first by Eurymachus and later by Leoides, Phemius, and Medon. In each case, we hear Odysseus' reasoned response and verdict before he either murders or spares the suppliants. Likewise, in consult with Eurycleia, we see Odysseus—now once again sovereign—choosing to execute twelve of his fifty female slaves. Laurel Fulkerson views the punishment of the slave women as a way to reclaim the household.[21] And there is a clear message of economic power in this domestic reclamation: through Eurymachus, the Homeric poet makes clear that Odysseus has the option of economic reparations, but—again, ostensibly clearheadedly—he declines the offer in favour of slaughtering more than one hundred suitors. The message is doubly one of power. Odysseus asserts the political authority to kill other aristocrats, afterwards acknowledging that even one of these killings is enough to send most people into exile:[22]

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18 Friedrich 1987:132–133. Friedrich draws the term "well-integrated man" from Stanford 1954.

19 McHardy 2008:52–53.

20 Mbembe 2019:70.

21 Fulkerson 2002.

22 Cf. Bakker 2013:130.

καὶ γάρ τίς θ' ἕνα φῶτα κατακτείνας ἐνὶ δήμῳ,
ᾧ μὴ πολλοὶ ἔωσιν ἀοσσητῆρες ὀπίσσω,
φεύγει πηούς τε προλιπὼν καὶ πατρίδα γαῖαν·
ἡμεῖς δ' ἕρμα πόληος ἀπέκταμεν, οἳ μέγ' ἄριστοι
κούρων εἰν Ἰθάκῃ· τὰ δέ σε φράζεσθαι ἄνωγα.

For if someone murders just one man in the land, even if he didn't have many friends, the killer is forced to run away and leave his homeland and family. But we have killed the mainstay of Ithaca, the island's best young men. You must consider this.

Odyssey 23.118–122

And Odysseus is financially secure enough to eat the losses of three years of constant one-hundred-person feasts through his stores.[23] The sovereignty regained through killing is reflected in dialogue. Ahl and Roisman note that, once the slaughter of the suitors is complete, both Odysseus and Telemachus drop *maia* 'mother' when they address Eurycleia in favour of the "more imperious" *grēu* 'old woman'.[24]

5 The Slave Women

So, at the surface level, the basic necropolitical claim to sovereignty is emphasized throughout Odysseus' reclamation of his palace. But there is considerably more at play in the manner of execution and the treatment of corpses. To begin, the slave women condemned to die find themselves in a state of social death prior to actual death, and so possess, per Agamben's distinction, *zoē* rather than *bios*—biological rather than a full or politically realized life.[25] Part of this, of

23 On Odysseus' disinterest in remuneration as a settlement, cf. McHardy 2008:53. Bakker 2013:151 tallies the *Odyssey*'s numerical information on Odysseus' estate and notes that, had Odysseus accepted Eurymachus' offer of restitution, in which each suitor would give restitution "worth twenty oxen" (*Odyssey* 22.57) plus gold and bronze, "Odysseus would have received almost four times the number of animals he had possessed before he set out on his voyage." Odysseus *does* voice his intent to recoup his livestock losses through raiding later in Book 23.

24 Ahl and Roisman 1996:256–257.

25 Agamben 1998:1. Weiner 2015 applies Agamben's distinction between *bios* and *zoē* to Sophocles' *Antigone*. Cf. Arendt 1958 on labour, ancient slavery, and status and the concept of *animal laborans*. Arendt argues that "The slave's degradation was a bow of fate worse than death, because it carried with it a metamorphosis of man into something akin to a

course, already stemmed from their dual status as both women and slaves.[26] And I join Mbembe's necropolitics to Orlando Patterson's precept that "all human relationships are structured and defined by … relative power" and that "slavery is one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination."[27] But upon being condemned to death for their 'disloyalty' and 'promiscuity' the final minutes of the women's lives read like a scene prefiguring the Holocaust. (I use these terms in quotes given the explicit context of rape; besides, in my view, the impossibility of consent for a slave, Odysseus himself levels this charge against the suitors: δμῳῇσιν δὲ γυναιξὶ παρευνάζεσθε βιαίως 'You raped my slave girls', 22.37.)[28] They are made to clean up the bodies of the previous mass-execution; sobbing, weeping, and ostensibly otherwise voiceless:

ὣς ἔφαθ', αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἀολλέες ἦλθον ἅπασαι,
αἷν' ὀλοφυρόμεναι, θαλερὸν κατὰ δάκρυ χέουσαι.
πρῶτα μὲν οὖν νέκυας φόρεον κατατεθνηῶτας,
κὰδ δ' ἄρ' ὑπ' αἰθούσῃ τίθεσαν εὐερκέος αὐλῆς,
ἀλλήλοισιν ἐρείδουσαι· σήμαινε δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς
αὐτὸς ἐπισπέρχων· ταὶ δ' ἐκφόρεον καὶ ἀνάγκῃ.

So he spoke, and the women all came in throngs, sobbing desperately, weeping, clutching at each other. They carried out the bodies of the dead and piled them on top of one another, under the roof outside. Odysseus instructed them and forced them to keep carrying them out.

Odyssey 22.446–451

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tame animal" (84). Arendt also quotes Barrow 1928:156: "This is why it is impossible 'to write a character sketch of any slave who lived … Until they emerge into freedom and notoriety, they remain shadowy types rather than persons'" (50n41). Simone Weil 1965:11 expresses a similar sentiment in *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*: "To lose more than the slave does is impossible, for he loses his whole inner life."

26 On the epistemological difficulty of detangling class and gender in Greek culture, see Joshel and Murnaghan 1998:8–9 and Thalmann 1998:22. Thalmann 1998:30, too, reads slaves as "socially dead." DuBois 2010:5 follows Patterson in noting the social death of slaves while keeping in mind subjectivity for slaves themselves.

27 Patterson 2018:1. Cf. Rankine 2011:36.

28 In partial contrast, Hunnings 2011:60 reads the slave women as acting as "free agents" in pleasuring the suitors, and so as stealing what rightfully belonged to Odysseus. Hunnings notes that Odysseus' order that the women should be killed by the sword has been read psychoanalytically to suggest rape and a final reclamation of bodies that are rightfully his (63–64). The paradoxical dual status of the women as enslaved victims and disloyal agents hints, I think, towards Thalmann's observation that, in the *Odyssey*, "the slave was an alien presence in the house who had to be relied on but could never be trusted." Fulker-

The women's wordless terror and grief conjures Simone Weil's observation, written against the backdrop of the Second World War and the camps, that the threat of force compels those in its grasp to weep, "fall silent, tremble, obey," and it turns such "unfortunate creatures" into "another human species, a compromise between a man and a corpse."[29] Above I invoke the Holocaust, and the scene resembles mass executions under the Nazis in which prisoners were made to dig their own graves, while *Sonderkommandos* in the extermination camps cleared the bodies of the dead before being executed themselves. In Agamben's terms (drawn from Roman law), these women are *homines sacri*, reduced to "bare life," they "*may be killed and yet not sacrificed*," the sense being that—by sovereign decree, violence can be done to them legally and with impunity.[30]

Once the women have completed their macabre final labour, they are herded into an inescapable confined area and executed *en masse*. This liminal space—both spatial and temporal—between the women's retrieval from their quarters and their hanging evokes Agamben's "limit zone between life and death" and Arendt's "shadowy realm":[31]

ὣς ἄρ᾽ ἔφη, καὶ πεῖσμα νεὸς κυανοπρῴροιο
κίονος ἐξάψας μεγάλης περίβαλλε θόλοιο,
ὑψόσ᾽ ἐπεντανύσας, μή τις ποσὶν οὖδας ἵκοιτο.
ὡς δ᾽ ὅτ᾽ ἂν ἢ κίχλαι τανυσίπτεροι ἠὲ πέλειαι
ἔρκει ἐνιπλήξωσι, τό θ᾽ ἑστήκῃ ἐνὶ θάμνῳ,
αὖλιν ἐσιέμεναι, στυγερὸς δ᾽ ὑπεδέξατο κοῖτος,
ὣς αἵ γ᾽ ἑξείης κεφαλὰς ἔχον, ἀμφὶ δὲ πάσαις
δειρῇσι βρόχοι ἦσαν, ὅπως οἴκτιστα θάνοιεν.
ἤσπαιρον δὲ πόδεσσι μίνυνθά περ οὔ τι μάλα δήν.

At that, he wound a piece of sailor's rope round the rotunda and round the mighty pillar, stretched up so high no foot could touch the ground. As doves or thrushes spread their wings to fly home to their nests, but someone sets a trap—they crash into a net, a bitter bedtime; just so the girls, their heads all in a row, were strung up with the noose around their

son 2002:346 argues that by going outside the house to sleep with the suitors, the women play a traditionally active masculine role in erotic desire and activity.

29 Weil 1965:9, 14. While Weil does discuss slaves specifically, she suggests that force transcends social status in its power. Cf. Shay 1994:52 on *Iliad* 18.20–79: "Homer affirms that Achilles is 'already dead' through a decisive set of poetic parallels."

30 Agamben 1998:8 (emphasis as original).

31 Agamben 1998:159; Arendt 1958:50; Mbembe 2019:75: "Slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life."

necks to make their death an agony. They gasped, feet twitching for a while, but not for long.

Odyssey 22.465–773

The poet meditates for three lines on the mechanics of stringing up the women (22.465–467) and for another six on the deaths themselves (22.468–473). Telemachus deems the women undeserving of a 'clean' death, and his ethical censure takes the form of what is apparently deemed a more abusive treatment of their bodies:

μὴ μὲν δὴ καθαρῷ θανάτῳ ἀπὸ θυμὸν ἑλοίμην
τάων, αἳ δὴ ἐμῇ κεφαλῇ κατ᾽ ὀνείδεα χεῦαν
μητέρι θ᾽ ἡμετέρῃ παρά τε μνηστῆρσιν ἴαυον.

I refuse to grant these girls a clean death, since they poured down shame on me and Mother, when they lay beside the suitors.

Odyssey 22.462–464

But there is no mention of cutting down the women or of removing their corpses, and, while Odysseus has the house washed and fumigated, by disobeying Odysseus' order to hack the women to death and hanging them instead, Telemachus ensures that whatever blood the men clean is not the women's. Robert Parker notes that Odysseus needs to purify his house (though not himself) after the slaughter of the suitors but does not suggest that the executions of the slaves demand rituals of purification.[32] Like Agamben's *homo sacer*, killing the slave women does not carry the *miasma* of homicide.[33] In short, we are not told what is done with their bodies, but I wonder if we are not invited to imagine this mass hanging left up long enough for the other slaves to see.[34] This reading is in agreement with Leanne Hunnings, who argues the strung-up women "[provide] a visual and psychological reminder to *every slave* within the household" that provides for the "steady maintenance of the institution."[35] At the very least, Eurycleia will have seen the spectacle to report to the rest of the slaves.[36]

32 Parker 1983:114n39. Cf. Fulkerson 2002:341.

33 Agamben 1998:183. On the death of (and penalties for) slaves, see Syrkou in this volume.

34 On spectacularized violence as a component of necropolitics, see also Velaoras in this volume (pp. 119–120n60).

35 Hunnings 2011:60 (emphasis as original).

36 I here invoke McClellan's list of historical analogues and its claim that "[s]pectacularized violence of this sort is intended to invoke audience gaze" (2019:3–4).

Either way, the execution of the women serves at least three necropolitical purposes: First, it re-establishes Odysseus as sovereign over his slaves through psychological terror. Second, outside the *oikos*, it sends the message that Odysseus is wealthy and powerful enough to execute roughly 25 % of his female slave labour, even after the suitors have eaten through his stores for several years.[37] We might compare with Arendt's assessment that part of what gives concentration camps their "distinctive and disturbing qualities" is their "non-utilitarian character": "the failure to keep them in a condition so that profitable work might be extorted from them, the superfluousness of frightening a completely subdued population."[38] Patrice Rankine suggests that Odysseus' "requirement for labour was secondary to his requirement for honour."[39] While honour is certainly at play, I might slightly emend Rankine's statement to suggest that Odysseus' requirement for power ranks high as a salient motive. Third, by executing the women in a different manner than his father instructed, Telemachus asserts his own coming of age and claim to a stake in sovereignty through his own necropolitical agency. To this end, Homer emphasizes Telemachus' initiative (ἦρχ᾽ ἀγορεύειν) and clear-mindedness (πεπνυμένος) at 22.461. Finally, *if* we do imagine a scene in which the 'loyal' slaves see the corpses of the dead women strung up in a row, I wonder if we might draw a grim parallel between this execution's function and anecdotes from American plantations, in which masters tortured and executed slaves to intimidate surviving slaves into obedience and so increased political power over the domestic and economic spheres.[40] Hunnings takes this connection a step further by suggesting that "the slave bodies dangling outside the house would have been heard [by the bard's audience] as a warning to others" and as an exemplary model anticipating slave handbooks of modernity.[41]

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37 Mbembe 2019:75: "As an instrument of labour, the slave has a price. As a property, the slave has a value." In refutation of Hegel, Patterson 2018:11 writes: "in a great many slaveholding societies masters were not interested in what their slaves produced." Cf. Rankine 2011:37: "labour and property (reasons for life's preservation) are not the *telos* of slavery."

38 Arendt 1950:50.

39 Rankine 2011:40.

40 As Aguirre, Jr. and Baker 1999:2–3 argue, American execution of slaves was a means of "*social control*" (emphasis as original), and executions were meant to protect the interests of slave owners, in part, by preventing insurrections. Cf. Mbembe 2019:75: "The violent tenor of the slave's life is manifested through the overseer's disposition to behave in a cruel and intemperate manner, as well as in the spectacle of pain inflicted on the slave's body. Violence, here, becomes an element in manners, like whipping, or taking the slave's life itself: an act of caprice and pure destruction aimed at instilling terror."

41 Hunnings 2011:65.

6 Melanthius

If I am correct that there is a political and performative message to the execution of the slave women, Odysseus and Telemachus pursue this course of action with even more determination by mutilating Melanthius, whose nostrils, hands, and feet are cut off, and whose innards are fed to the dogs.[42] This certainly is performative in its message of necropolitical power. The line demarcating life and death is blurred here, as Malcolm Davies lays out: it is at best unclear whether Melanthius is killed; left alive to die a slow, excruciating, and unsightly death; or perhaps left maimed and alive.[43] To borrow a phrase from the film *The Princess Bride* (1987, dir. Rob Reiner), the violence done to Melanthius is not to the death but worse: it is "to the pain." I thus read a Mbembian blurred line between life and death. However long or slow the process of death, Odysseus and Telemachus make a living corpse of Melanthius, what Page DuBois might call a "living warning," which emphasizes his socio-political exile and sends yet another grim and crystal-clear message to the surviving slaves.[44]

7 Conclusions

Odysseus does not perform anything approaching funerary rites for any of those slaughtered in Book 22. But there is a clear, albeit tacit, hierarchy to the fates of the corpses. First, as yet another display of sovereign power, there is no suggestion that Odysseus honours any of the dead in a meaningful way. The suitors' bodies, who are free and aristocratic, some of them local to Ithaca, do receive an explicit *Nachleben*. As Odysseus' enemies, they are not granted burial by the king. However, they *are* given somewhat neutral treatment. On the one hand, Odysseus has the corpses of the suitors heaped up in a pile outside the gates (22.446–451), ostensibly subject to degradations caused by heat, insects, and scavenging animals, especially since Odysseus delays word of the slaughter by the ruse of a fake wedding party. Odysseus does not notify the

42 I wonder, speculatively, if there is not something playfully macabre here. At the onset of the battle with the suitors, Odysseus exclaims: ὦ κύνες 'You dogs!' (*Odyssey* 22.35). Melanthius has thus been helping to feed the dogs throughout the suitors' presence in the *oikos*.

43 Davies 1994. I am grateful to Andrew McClellan for this point; see McClellan 2019:35. By contrast, Thalmann 1998:23 presumes that Melanthius is, in fact, put to death.

44 DuBois 1991:148.

families, but he does not prevent them from recovering and honouring the bodies. By the following day "swift rumour spread the news all through the city of the suitors' dreadful murder" (Ὄσσα δ' ἄρ' ἄγγελος ὦκα κατὰ πτόλιν ᾤχετο πάντη, / μνηστήρων στυγερὸν θάνατον καὶ κῆρ' ἐνέπουσα, 24.413–414). Bodies are reclaimed, buried, and mourned, and those from elsewhere are repatriated by ship:

οἱ δ' ἄρ' ὁμῶς ἀΐοντες ἐφοίτων ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος
μυχμῷ τε στοναχῇ τε δόμων προπάροιθ' Ὀδυσῆος,
ἐκ δὲ νέκυς οἴκων φόρεον καὶ θάπτον ἕκαστοι,
τοὺς δ' ἐξ ἀλλάων πολίων οἰκόνδε ἕκαστον
πέμπον ἄγειν ἁλιεῦσι θοῇς ἐπὶ νηυσὶ τιθέντες

When the people heard, they rushed from all directions towards the palace of Odysseus, with shouts and lamentations. Then they brought the bodies from the house and buried them. The ones from distant towns were sent back home by ship.

Odyssey 24.415–419

Despite being political enemies of the sovereign Odysseus, these bodies maintain some level of status and the right to be mourned. And, of course, the insurrection of the relatives in Book 24 suggests a challenge to Odysseus' necropolitical rights over these erstwhile lives.

By contrast, at the bottom of the social spectrum, Melanthius is mutilated, and the poet exhibits no concern over the bodies of the slave women. As I have suggested, I imagine the abused body of Melanthius and the twelve corpses of the slave women serve a performative and intimidating function. But, regardless of any implied spectacle, the poet does not deem these bodies worthy of further comment once the executions and/or mutilations have been performed. Even in death, their status as slaves is emphasized by the abuse done to their corpses, the irrelevance of burial, and the impossibility of mourning. Mbembe's necropolitics avers that "the slave's condition results from a triple loss: loss of a 'home', loss of rights over one's body, and loss of political status."[45] For Odysseus' slaves, the absence of political status results in the most extreme treatment of their bodies, and death. And, having lost or never had a home, they lack families to retrieve or bargain for their corpses.[46] As Mbe-

45 Mbembe 2019:74–75. The passage continues: "This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether)."

46 On bargaining for corpses, cf. Priam's plea to Achilles in *Iliad* 24.

mbe writes, "such a death is something to which nobody feels any obligation to respond."[47]

In addition to their funerary rites or lack thereof, there is also something, I think, to be said about the social stratification implicit in the afterlife scenes. Book 24 opens with the suitors' arrival in the underworld, and they protest the treatment of their corpses and assert a necropolitical right to burial:

ὧν ἔτι καὶ νῦν
σώματ᾽ ἀκηδέα κεῖται ἐνὶ μεγάροις Ὀδυσῆος
οὐ γάρ πω ἴσασι φίλοι κατὰ δώμαθ᾽ ἑκάστου,
οἵ κ᾽ ἀπονίψαντες μέλανα βρότον ἐξ ὠτειλέων
κατθέμενοι γοάοιεν· ὃ γὰρ γέρας ἐστὶ θανόντων.

Our bodies still lie unburied in our killer's house. Our families at home do not yet know. They need to wash the black blood from our wounds. And weep for us and lay our bodies out. This is the honour due the dead.

Odyssey 24.186–190

But, despite their nearly contemporaneous deaths (at least in the case of the women), the slave women and Melanthius do not appear. As internal narrator, Odysseus reports in Book 11 that upon his arrival to the underworld a mass of "shades came up out of Erebus and gathered round" (αἱ δ᾽ ἀγέροντο / ψυχαὶ ὑπὲξ Ἐρέβευς νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων, 11.36–37). These include teenagers, girls and boys, the elderly, young women who died in childbirth, and soldiers killed in action (11.38–41). Additionally, "some women came, sent by Persephone—the daughters and wives of warriors" (αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες / ἦλυθον, ὤτρυνεν γὰρ ἀγαυὴ Περσεφόνεια, / ὅσσαι ἀριστήων ἄλοχοι ἔσαν ἠδὲ θύγατρες, 11.225–227). But there is no mention of slaves in this general mass, nor are any mentioned after. I believe their absence, especially in Book 24, leaves us to imagine that they may be unburied, and, perhaps, even to question whether slaves possess a soul in the Homeric imagination. At the very least, once no longer useful to serve in life, they no longer matter in death, and their absence in the underworld narrations underscores the abject status of slaves and their bodies. To connect Mbembe's necropolitics with Agamben's biopolitics, do those who had only *zoē* but not a politically realized *bios* in life, and so experience social death, conversely lack afterlives in their actual deaths? In any case, the act of killing and control over

47 Mbembe 2019:38.

the bodies of those under his dominion is central to Odysseus' reclamation of sovereignty.

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CHAPTER 4

Sophocles' *Ajax*: The Necropolitical Treatment of the Hero's Life and Death

Efimia D. Karakantza

1 My Argument and Theoretical Considerations

In this paper, I will attempt something which is rarely done in classical scholarship: I will 'read' Sophocles' *Ajax* with recourse to the concept of necropolitics, as elaborated by contemporary political theorists and philosophers. I begin by arguing that Ajax is 'framed'—to recall Judith Butler's term from *Frames of War*[1]—that is, his life is placed in a framework which is "politically saturated"[2] so that Ajax is apprehended as physically vulnerable, socially outlawed, a non-political entity which can be disposed of with impunity. The latter formulation leads us closer to Agamben's *homo sacer*. Ajax bears similarities—I argue—with the Agambenian *homo sacer*, the original conceptual notion which describes a person whose life under Roman law was "situated at the intersection of a capacity to be killed and yet not sacrificed, outside both human and divine law."[3] Most importantly, his killing remained unpunishable and could be performed by anyone in the community with impunity;[4] in other words, the killing of the *homo sacer* was *not* considered homicide.[5]

The special status of the *homo sacer*, applicable in (post)modernity to various categories of subjects, opens up the discussion of the 'state of exception' (which can be identified in colonies, concentration and/or extermina-

1 *Frames of War* (2009) follows up closely the ideas expressed in *Precarious Life* (2006), "especially its suggestion that specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological *frames*, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense" (2009:1—my emphasis). These frames are themselves "operations of power" (or exercises of power) which "further the workings of the state" (2009:149). Within these frameworks of power Butler places the 'precarious life' and the 'ungrievable life'. This is also how I use the terms 'frames' and 'framed'.

2 Butler 2009:1.

3 Agamben 1998:74.

4 Agamben 1998:73–74.

5 Agamben 1998:116, 139.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_005

tion camps, dispossessed lands, authoritarian regimes, normative institutions, neo-colonial realities etc.). The state of exception allows the sovereign power to reduce human lives into 'bare lives', that is, lives that are situated on a "threshold beyond which life ceases to have any juridical value and can therefore be killed without the commission of a homicide."[6] A bare life is a life 'devoid of value' or a 'life unworthy of being lived', to use Agamben's words, which is reshaped into the Butlerian concepts of 'unliveable life' and 'ungrievable death'.[7] A 'bare life' is a political concept (not an ethical one) since "what is at issue is the extreme metamorphosis of the sacred life—which may be killed but not sacrificed—on which sovereign power is founded." In other words: "in modern biopolitics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or the non-value of life as such. Life … now itself becomes the place of a sovereign decision."[8]

The title hero in Sophocles' *Ajax* meets a number of the aforementioned criteria of a 'bare life' as he is driven—I argue—into a state of *atimia*. The Greek term *atimia* 'disenfranchisement' is the technical term describing a life devoid of political rights (in the Archaic period perhaps even of civic rights). This makes the individual vulnerable since his/her legal status is erased.[9] In this sense, *atimia* can be understandably compared to the 'state of exception' which Agamben has thoroughly examined in his book with the same title[10] and which denotes the capacity of state power to withdraw the guarantees of legal protection and entitlement. The state of exception erases any legal status of the individual[11] and it is closely connected with civil war, insurrection, and resistance.[12] It constitutes "the suspension of the juridical order itself,"[13] which leads to the following paradoxical question: "How can an anomie be inscribed

6 Agamben 1998:139.

7 Butler 2006, Butler 2009 *passim*.

8 Agamben 1998:142. See also Velaoras in this volume (p. 6).

9 The term *atimia* is still debated among scholars, who have not reached a conclusion yet whether *atimia* means a complete annihilation of civic and political rights or only of political rights (the civic status being protected); and whether there is an evolution of the meaning of the term in classical texts in Athens from the 6th to the 5th century. For a detailed analysis of the debate over the term and how it is applied to literary texts such as *Ajax*, see below in the current essay.

10 The 'sequel' to *Homo Sacer*, published originally in Italian in 2003. Here I am using the English edition published by the University of Chicago Press in 2005 (translated by Kevin Attell).

11 Agamben 2005:3.

12 Agamben 2005:2.

13 Agamben 2005:4.

within a juridical order?"[14] The answer is equally paradoxical: as the state of exception "appears as the legal form of what cannot have legal form,"[15] it allows an 'anomic' zone to be created within the legal/juridical order of the state—in close connection with law and at the same time dissociated from it.[16] Individuals are deprived of their legal status by decree of the sovereign power, the leader of an army, or a state—be it totalitarian or democratic. Deprived of its legal status, the life of an individual becomes unliveable, and so his death is ungrievable.

There is one last parameter I would like to add before turning my attention to the figure of Ajax himself. An individual whose life is 'bare' can also be an individual who is banned from his city, a bandit living in the liminal space "between the forest and the city," or "a monstrous hybrid of human and animal," the 'werewolf' of many cultures. Between "animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion," the sacred man or bandit or werewolf "is precisely neither man nor beast, … [he] dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither."[17] This fusion between human and beast subsumed in the figure of the banned person is strikingly instantiated by the Sophoclean Ajax as a hunted animal, as we will see shortly.

As *Ajax* opens *in medias res*,[18] we, the spectators, are confronted with the striking image of a cruel Athena, present on stage albeit invisible to other characters, who is determined to continue ridiculing and humiliating Ajax by making him prey to such delusion of mind that leads him to his demise. Another striking picture is painted by the hunting imagery that opens the play, with Ajax being the hunted animal and Odysseus the hunter. Thus, I will argue that Ajax is depicted as a targeted individual, a 'framed' human being who is cruelly hunted by the goddess Athena and finally ensnared and led to kill himself. The scene of Ajax smeared with blood and collapsing on a pile of dead animals, himself in the state of a 'living dead', corroborates the equation. This cruelty of the goddess has greatly puzzled scholars so far, for it is hardly attested in any other literary

14 Agamben 2005:23.
15 Agamben 2005:1.
16 Agamben 2005:59.
17 Agamben 1998:105.
18 Strikingly unconventional is this Sophoclean prologue that introduces the spectators directly to the action and the story, unlike the prologues in Euripidean tragedy, where the prologue is often dissociated from the action which begins *after* it. Usually, the person(s) who utter(s) the lines—ὁ προλογίζων/οἱ προλογίζοντες—are persons who are not involved in the action and leave the scene once they have said what they have come to say to introduce the action (Lorentzatos 2002:46 on lines 1–133).

source.[19] I suggest that Athena (personifying the Athenian state) may be seen as the state power that dismisses dissident individuals as 'living dead' or as 'material' to be disposed of.[20] The necropolitical power exerted over the living body of Ajax continues after his death. His body becomes the "postmortem object and site of violence,"[21] where the sovereign policies of the Atreidae are applied. To intimidate, control and discipline the living (Ajax's family and the Salaminian sailors/comrades), the Atreidae choose to leave the body unburied for further humiliation and desecration. I will also argue that the burial, which is finally (but reluctantly) allowed, is performed hastily and non-ceremonially,[22] so that even this rudimentary ritual becomes devoid of its symbolic force.

2 Close-Reading the Play: The Imagery of the Hunted 'Enemy'

I begin with the striking hunting metaphor used to describe the hunted Ajax, with the 'hound' Odysseus at his heels. The entire situation is depicted as a hunting scene: Odysseus, representing the sovereign power, that is the political will of the Atreidae and the entire camp of the Achaeans, is sent as a scout to spot the enemy, seize him, and bring him back to the camp so that he can be punished. The following are the very first lines of the play uttered by the goddess Athena:[23]

Ἀεὶ μέν, ὦ παῖ Λαρτίου, δέδορκά σε
πεῖράν τιν᾽ ἐχθρῶν ἁρπάσαι *θηρώμενον*·
καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ *σκηναῖς* σε ναυτικαῖς ὁρῶ
Αἴαντος, ἔνθα τάξιν ἐσχάτην ἔχει,
πάλαι κυνηγετοῦντα καὶ μετρούμενον
ἴχνη τὰ κείνου νεοχάραχθ᾽, ὅπως ἴδῃς
εἴτ᾽ ἔνδον εἴτ᾽ οὐκ ἔνδον. Εὖ δέ σ᾽ ἐκφέρει
κυνὸς Λακαίνης ὥς τις εὔρινος βάσις·
ἔνδον γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἄρτι τυγχάνει, κάρα
στάζων ἱδρῶτι καὶ χέρας ξιφοκτόνους

19 Karakantza 2010:5n13.

20 As exemplified, with reference to the 21st century, in Butler 2009; Islekel 2017; Balkan 2019; Bargu 2019; Özdemir and Özyürek 2019.

21 Bargu 2016:n.p. (= Bargu 2019:213).

22 As I have argued elsewhere (Karakantza 2011:39–40); see also my argument later in this chapter.

23 I am using the 2011 edition and translation by Finglass.

> Son of Laertes I have always seen you *hunting* to seize some opportunities against your enemies. And now I see you at the marine encampment of Ajax, where he holds the extreme position, *on the trail for some time and measuring his freshly-printed footprints*, to see whether or not he is inside. Well does your course bring you to your goal, like that of a keen-scented Laconian dog, for the man is now inside, *dripping with sweat from his head and hands which kill with a sword*.
>
> *Ajax* 1–10 (my emphasis)

The first two lines of the play present Odysseus scheming against his enemies, defining right from the start the power relations: the superior intelligence and scheming of Odysseus have targeted Ajax, who is deluded and plunged into insanity, as we are to hear shortly. Since the wielder of power has been defined, we expect the marginalization and degradation of the 'lesser' hero. Thus, the hunting metaphor and vocabulary (θηρώμενον, 2; κυνηγετοῦντα, 5; ἴχνη … νεοχάραχθ', 6; ἰχνεύω, 20) are fully justified: Odysseus is the hunter and Ajax the hunted 'animal' to be caught and killed. However, this constitutes an interesting reversal of the (extra-dramatic) events of the previous night (νύκτωρ, 47; ἄκρας νυκτός, 285); there, it was Ajax who went 'hunting' and struck first, as he set out in the middle of the night—sword in hand (10, 287)—to find and kill the Atreidae and Odysseus. But, now, at the break of dawn, after the mass killing of his 'enemies' and the capture of others, Ajax is rapidly reduced to the position of the animal-victim. We know that, in the delusion of his mind, he only managed to kill animals, so the picture of him smeared with blood and covered in sweat points directly to the reversal of the relations of power: he is *not* the hunter, but the hunted animal. He is now 'trapped' only to become prey to the sarcastic vindictiveness of goddess Athena and the superior power of the Atreidae, who plan to kill him. As Finglass puts it, goddess Athena "toys with both men, gently with Odysseus …, cruelly with Ajax …"[24] The reversal of the hunting is corroborated by Odysseus equated with a hunting dog from Lakonia/Lacedaemon, the finest kind of hunting dog (κυνὸς Λακαίνης, 8).[25]

There are two more textual/scenic signs that 'frame' Ajax as an inferior individual. The first is an unconventional 'bold stroke' on the part of Sophocles: Ajax appears from the start as afflicted with madness, unlike other dramatic

24 Finglass 2011 on lines 1–133.

25 Even in Modern Greek, the word λαγωνικό (a slight corruption of the original epithet λακωνικό = a dog coming from Lacedaemon) is used to denote a fine hunting dog. The original Greek is κύων Λακαίνης, genitive case: κυνός Λακαίνης (Lorentzatos 2002 on line 8).

heroes who are seen first in their sane condition (such as Orestes in Euripides' *Orestes* and Heracles in Euripides' *Heracles*).[26] This delusion of mind breaks down the dividing line between human and animal, or human and non-human, the first part of the equation representing rationality and political power, the second a lack of both. It also intensifies the tragic situation that will follow: when Ajax returns to 'sanity', he plunges "into deeper grief and degradation."[27] The second 'bold stroke' by Sophocles is the unconventional use of the *skēnē* doorway, which is probably open during the prologue as characters (Odysseus, Athena) look through it (from the start up to at least line 117).[28] Inside, a deluded individual smeared with blood among animals—some dead, others still alive—becomes the 'toy' of the cruel Athena, and soon will share a fate more cruel than that of his victims.

At this point, I cannot but recall another powerful iconic image of a hunted man who is followed closely by his pursuer, the latter characterized as a hound, the former as a deer's fawn. And this hunt leads to the first notorious maltreatment of a body in Western literature. I am referring to Achilles chasing Hector and forcing him to run three times around the walls of Troy:

τῇ ῥα παραδραμέτην, φεύγων, ὁ δ᾽ ὄπισθε διώκων·
πρόσθε μὲν ἐσθλὸς ἔφευγε, δίωκε δέ μιν μέγ᾽ ἀμείνων
καρπαλίμως, ἐπεὶ οὐχ ἱερήϊον οὐδὲ βοείην
ἀρνύσθην, ἅ τε ποσσὶν ἀέθλια γίγνεται ἀνδρῶν,
ἀλλὰ περὶ ψυχῆς θέον Ἕκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο.

Ἕκτορα δ᾽ ἀσπερχὲς κλονέων ἔφεπ᾽ ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς.
ὡς δ᾽ ὅτε νεβρὸν ὄρεσφι κύων ἐλάφοιο δίηται,
ὄρσας ἐξ εὐνῆς, διά τ᾽ ἄγκεα καὶ διὰ βήσσας·
τὸν δ᾽ εἴ πέρ τε λάθῃσι καταπτήξας ὑπὸ θάμνῳ,
ἀλλά τ᾽ ἀνιχνεύων θέει ἔμπεδον ὄφρα κεν εὕρῃ·
ὣς Ἕκτωρ οὐ λῆθε ποδώκεα Πηλεΐωνα.
ὁσσάκι δ᾽ ὁρμήσειε πυλάων Δαρδανιάων
ἀντίον αἴξασθαι ἐϋδμήτους ὑπὸ πύργους,
εἴ πώς οἱ καθύπερθεν ἀλάλκοιεν βελέεσσι,
τοσσάκι μιν προπάροιθεν ἀποστρέψασκε παραφθὰς
πρὸς πεδίον· αὐτὸς δὲ ποτὶ πτόλιος πέτετ᾽ αἰεί.

26 Finglass 2011:136 on lines 1–133.
27 Finglass 2011:136 on lines 1–133.
28 Clarke 2019:856.

They ran by these springs, pursuer and pursued—
A great man out front, a far greater behind—
And they run all out. This was not a race
For such a prize as athletes compete for,
An oxhide or animal for sacrifice, but a race
For the lifeblood of Hector, breaker of horses.

As Achilles bore down on Hector.
A hunting hound starts a fawn in the hills,
Follows it through brakes and hollows,
And if it hides in a thicket, circles,
Picks up the trail, and renews the chase.
No more could Hector elude Achilles.
Every time Hector surged for the Western Gate
Under the massive towers, hoping for
Trojans archers to give him some cover,
Achilles cut him off and turned him back
Toward the plain, keeping the inside track.

Iliad 22.157–161, 188–198 (trans. LOMBARDO—my emphasis)

The 'hunt' will end in the duel of the two heroes, the trick of Athena against Hector, his death, and the infamous dragging of his body behind Achilles' chariot. The assimilation of Achilles to a hunting hound and of Hector to a fawn is embedded in the Homeric simile, a narratological device that somehow 'distances' the two worlds: the human and the animal world. In *Ajax*, however, the assimilation is tighter and leaves no room for doubt or for a different outcome. Moreover, the *Iliad* ends with a soothing reconciliation between the enemies (Achilles and Hector's father), and Hector's ransomed body is given back to his family for burial (Book 24). This is *not* at all the case in Sophocles' treatment of the story of Ajax.

There is further assimilation of Ajax to the hunted animals he slew, which is corroborated by the two vivid 'visual' pictures in the first episode. The first is conveyed through the words of Tecmessa describing Ajax immediately after coming to his senses:

καὶ πλῆρες ἄτης ὡς διοπτεύει στέγος,
παίσας κάρα θώϋξεν· *ἐν δ' ἐρειπίοις*
νεκρῶν ἐρειφθεὶς ἕζετ' ἀρνείου φόνου,
κόμην ἀπρὶξ ὄνυξι συλλαβὼν χερί.
καὶ τὸν μὲν ἦστο πλεῖστον ἄφθογγος χρόνον·

> And when he saw that the hut was full of destruction, he struck his head and cried out. *Then he fell among the fallen corpses of the slaughtered sheep and sat there*, grasping his hair tightly in his hands with his nails. And he sat there for a long time, without speaking.
>
> *Ajax* 307–311 (my emphasis)

As a reader, I have always been struck by this image of a blood-smeared Ajax fallen on top of a pile of slaughtered animals: an immobile, breathless body, among lifeless corpses. Evidently, we cannot really know how this scene was represented in front of the ancient spectators, when the central door of the scenic edifice (*skēnē*) opens and Ajax is brought on the *ekkyklēma*, i.e. a wheeled platform which was normally used to bring dead people on stage (*Ajax* 346–347).[29] He is definitely covered in blood but we cannot tell how the slaughtered animals are represented. Undoubtedly, it must have been "a shocking visual tableau."[30] How is Ajax different from the slain animals? It is interesting to note that the now wretched body of Ajax once belonged to the stout hero, the acclaimed 'bulwark of the Achaeans'. In the *Iliad*, Ajax protected all the Achaeans; in Sophocles he is threatened with public death by stoning.[31]

And a little further down we read:

> ἀλλ ἀψόφητος ὀξέων κωκυμάτων
> ὑπεστέναζε, *ταῦρος ὡς βρυχώμενος*.
> Νῦν δ᾽ ἐν τοιᾷδε κείμενος κακῇ τύχῃ
> ἄσιτος ἀνήρ, ἄποτος, ἐν μέσοις βοτοῖς
> σιδηροκμῆσιν ἥσυχος θακεῖ πεσών·
>
> But without the sound of shrill lamentations, he would groan deeply *like a bellowing bull*. But now, laid low by this evil fate, the man sits quietly where he has fallen, without food, without drink, in the midst of beasts slain by the sword.
>
> *Ajax* 321–325 (my emphasis)

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29 "As often, the phrase 'the doors are open: now you can see inside' signals the imminent appearance of the *ekkyklēma*" (Finglass 2011:238 on lines 346–347, where he refers to Taplin's classic monograph [1977:443]). But compare also Clytemnestra on the *ekkyklēma* platform in Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1372, when she is rolled out of the *skēnē* door, sword in hand, stained with blood, over the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra (Finglass 2011 on lines 328–329; Sommerstein 2008:167).

30 Finglass 2011:241 on lines 348–429.

31 The ontology of the body is a social ontology (Butler 2009:3).

A bull, however strong it might be, could be subdued by a small whip (*Ajax* 1253–1254), says Agamemnon in the *exodos* of the play, referring to Ajax and pointing to the power relation between the animal and its master: the Atreidae were the masters of Ajax, whom he had to obey. Not surprisingly, Sophocles uses the image of the hunted bull that is being pursued in the wild in order to be caught and killed in his description of another iconic figure of his plays: the murderer of Laius, the unknown stranger who is cast out of the community of Thebes, deprived of civic rights, cursed with heavy judicial/religious prohibitions; an outlaw, an accursed *xenos*, to be hunted down and killed or exiled:

> Ἔλαμψε γὰρ τοῦ νιφόεν-
> τος ἀρτίως φανεῖσα
> φάμα Παρνασσοῦ τὸν ἄδη-
> λον ἄνδρα πάντ' *ἰχνεύειν*·[32]
> φοιτᾷ γὰρ ὑπ' ἀγρίαν
> ὕλαν ἀνά τ' ἄντρα καὶ
> *πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος* …
>
> For recently the message shown out clear from snowy Parnassus, that everyone should *hunt for* the unknown man. For he wanders through the wild wood, into caves, and *over rocks, the bull* …
>
> *Oedipus Tyrannus* 473–478 (my emphasis)[33]

I have argued at length elsewhere[34] that the "bull over the rocks" (πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος) in the wilderness of a forest virtually assimilates Oedipus ('the unknown man' of the first *stasimon*) to a bull that is being hunted by the entire community. The syntax of πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος is unique (and thus often disputed)[35] and powerful. The absence of the comparative word ὡς, which would be expected in such a comparison, underscores not just the simple assimilation of the human (Oedipus) to the animal (bull) but the absolute identification of the two. Sophocles moves the image even further: the lines that follow (μέλεος μελέῳ ποδὶ χηρεύων, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 479) point to the complete desolation of the animal/man on the run with his limping sore-wounded foot trying to flee from the human communities to avoid the fulfillment of the prophecies.

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32 'following the tracks'; similarly, earlier in *Ajax* 6, 20; see also the satyr drama *Ichneutai* (= the Trackers).

33 The text and the translation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in this essay are by Finglass (2018).

34 Karakantza 2022a:265–269.

35 Karakantza 2022a:266n2.

He is banned from his political community, as a wild animal would have been. Agamben dedicates an entire chapter of his *Homo Sacer* to elucidate the bandit and the outlaw in the form of the werewolf, the wolf-man of the Germanic and Scandinavian traditions, who is undoubtedly a "brother of *homo sacer*,"[36] a hybrid of human and animal who has been banned from the city.[37] Whoever was banned could well be considered as good as dead, for "anyone was permitted to kill him without committing homicide."[38] Living on the threshold between human society and wilderness, the man is transformed into a wolf, and the wolf into a man. And as Agamben explains:

> This lupization of man and humanization of the wolf is at every moment possible in the *dissolutio civitatis* [= the dissolution of the civil state] inaugurated by the state of exception. This threshold alone, which is neither simple natural life nor social life but rather *bare life* or *sacred life*, is the always present and always operative presupposition of sovereignty.[39]

The irony, of course, is that king Oedipus, who sets the ban on the culprit and binds the entire community and himself with the curses/prohibitions that place him in a state of exception, is the one who will be proven the perpetrator and the outcast. There is a state of emergency in the city of Thebes in *Oedipus Tyrannus* (the widespread plague, 1–215), which makes the sovereign proclaim that some people will be excepted from the protection of the law, thus becoming *homines sacri*. Nowhere are these declarations more explicit than in the following lines:

> Τὸν ἄνδρ᾽ ἀπαυδῶ τοῦτον, ὅστις ἐστί, γῆς
> τῆσδ᾽ ἧς ἐγὼ κράτη τε καὶ θρόνους νέμω
> μήτ᾽ εἰσδέχεσθαι μήτε προσφωνεῖν τινά,
> μήτ᾽ ἐν θεῶν εὐχαῖσι μήτε θύμασιν
> κοινὸν ποιεῖσθαι, μήτε χέρνιβος νέμειν·
> ὠθεῖν δ᾽ ἀπ᾽ οἴκων πάντας, ὡς μιάσματος
> τοῦδ᾽ ἥμιν ὄντος, ὡς τὸ Πυθικὸν θεοῦ
> μαντεῖον ἐξέφηνεν ἀρτίως ἐμοί.

36 Agamben 1998:104–111.
37 Agamben 1998:105.
38 Agamben 1998:104.
39 Agamben 1998:106—my emphasis.

246 [κατεύχομαι δὲ τὸν δεδρακότ', εἴτε τις
εἷς ὢν λέληθεν εἴτε πλειόνων μέτα,
κακὸν κακῶς νιν ἄμορον ἐκτρῖψαι βίον …]

As for this man, whoever he is, I forbid anyone from this land, whose authority and throne I hold, to receive into his home or to address him, or to make him a fellow-participant in prayers to the gods or in sacrifices, or to give him his allotment of sacred water. Rather, I command everyone to drive him from their homes, since this man is the cause of our pollution, as the god's Pythian oracle has just revealed to me … [I pray that the perpetrator, whether he is a single person in hiding, or whether he did it as part of a larger group, will, as a wretch, wretchedly rub out his life, without his due portion …]

Oedipus Tyrannus 236–248

At this point we approach ever more closely the original figure of the Roman *homo sacer*, who is at the same time sacred and cursed. He cannot be immolated, nor can he stand trial because his status falls outside the juridical procedures of the city-state; at the same time, he can be killed with impunity. Both sacred and cursed, both human and animal, both on the threshold to enter culture and still in the grip of wilderness. The outcast is the 'pollution' of the community, or, as it is often said in the play, the 'disease' (νόσος) that needs to be cured (or the 'diseased part' that needs to be cut off from the community and killed). This wording is very reminiscent of the rhetoric of contemporary authoritarian regimes.

3 The State of *Atimia*: The Sovereign's Discourse and the Degraded Corpse

From the moment Ajax was declared the enemy of the Achaeans, the sovereigns—Agamemnon and Menelaus—declare their right to maltreat his body by refusing him burial and lamentation. They also threaten the entire family with extinction. Tecmessa, his wife, and his young boy Eurysakes are in extreme danger:

985 ΤΕΥΚ: Οὐχ ὅσον τάχος
δῆτ' αὐτὸν [sc. Εὐρυσάκην] ἄξεις δεῦρο, μή τις ὡς κενῆς
σκύμνον λεαίνης δυσμενῶν ἀναρπάσῃ;
ἴθ', ἐγκόνει, σύγκαμνε. τοῖς θανοῦσί τοι
φιλοῦσι πάντες κειμένοις ἐπεγγελᾶν.

> Then won't you bring him [sc. Eurysakes] here with all speed, in case an enemy seizes him like the whelp of a lioness robbed of her mate? Go, make haste, join in the labour! All men love to mock the dead as they lie.
>
> *Ajax* 985–989

We may compare the state of Ajax and his family to a state of *atimia* 'disenfranchisement', that is the loss of the ordinary privileges of citizenship and the concomitant protection of the law.[40] The citizen who was declared *atimos* was powerless in his *polis*; he did not have the right to participate in the Assembly, nor the right to bring actions before the court of law; in essence, he was a citizen condemned to a physical as well as to a long-term social death.[41] We need to note here, however, that it is hard to give a unique (and unanimously accepted) definition of the term, for there are multiple degrees or aspects of the status of *atimos*, and various sub-categories of *atimia*. The meaning of the word itself underwent a significant evolution following the differentiation over the centuries of the notion of citizen and of the political system,[42] yet it never lost its moral sense.[43] Although we lack a precise legal definition of the term,[44] *atimia* might entail—under certain circumstances—physical death with impunity, confiscation of property, degrading of children and family, denial of burial in case of execution, as well as further dishonouring and maltreatment of the body after the execution.[45] In the case of necropolitical treatment of a citizen's corpse, exhumation of the bones was also performed.

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40 Sakellariou 1999:136 includes ἀτιμία (= the loss of citizen rights) in the three categories of severe punishments in store, and used by the Athenian democracy, for citizens who wronged the city-state. Ober 1998:24–29, 128–129, and 149 defines it as partial loss of the ordinary privileges of citizenship. However, a lot of difficulties arise when we try to trace the meaning of the term from the 6th down to the 4th century BCE. The traditional view that in the Archaic period *atimia* was the complete lack of protection from the law and thus the *atimos* was in danger of being killed with impunity, while in the 5th and 4th century BCE *atimia* only entailed loss of political rights, has been disputed and refined. See Bosnakis 2020:49–51 (with the relevant bibliography) and Joyce 2018:33–60.

41 Bosnakis 2020:49.

42 Bosnakis 2020:49. See also Hansen 1976:75; Manville 1989:213; Youni 2001:124–125; Dmitriev 2015:35–39; and Joyce 2018:34–39 and 35n5.

43 Joyce 2018:60.

44 Joyce 2018:36.

45 The most striking example of the entire set of punishments mentioned above is the text of the condemnation of two of the leaders of the regime of the 400, Antiphon and Archeptolemus. The text is preserved in [Plutarch] *Lives of the Ten Orators* 834a–b and runs as follows:

> Προδοσίας ὤφλον Ἀρχεπτόλεμος Ἱπποδάμου Ἀγρύληθεν παρών, Ἀντιφῶν Σοφίλου Ῥαμνούσιος παρών· τούτοιν ἐτιμήθη τοῖς ἔνδεκα παραδοθῆναι καὶ τὰ χρήματα δημόσια εἶναι καὶ

Dimitrios Bosnakis recently (2020) published a book in Modern Greek titled *Dejection and Blame: Degraded and Insulted Dead*, where, within the context of the 'archaeology of death', he studies the treatment of the corpse and the deviant practices used in cases of degrading and insulting rites:[46] shackled corpses, lying face down, decapitated or generally mutilated; profane public mass burials; disgraceful stigmatization of corpses interred together with the instruments that caused their death.[47] The insult extends to the burial mode: anonymity, roughness, mass burials, absence of offerings; and also to the topography of the burial sites: remote locations inside or outside the communities' cemeteries, marginalization or obliteration from the public topography and memory.[48]

From the ancient evidence, let me take a leap to contemporary societies. Osman Balkan begins his paper on 'the cemetery of traitors', a burial ground constructed for the putschists (conspirators) killed in the failed military coup of 15 July 2016 against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government, with the following words:

τῆς θεοῦ τὸ ἐπιδέκατον, καὶ τὼ οἰκία κατασκάψαι αὐτῶν καὶ ὅρους θεῖναι τοῖν οἰκοπέδοιν, ἐπιγράψαντας "ΑΡΧΕΠΤΟΛΕΜΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΤΙΦΩΝΤΟΣ ΤΟΙΝ ΠΡΟΔΟΤΑΙΝ." τὼ δὲ δημάρχω ἀποφῆναι τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῖν καὶ μὴ ἐξεῖναι θάψαι Ἀρχεπτόλεμον καὶ Ἀντιφῶντα Ἀθήνησι, μηδ' ὅσης Ἀθηναῖοι κρατοῦσι· καὶ ἄτιμον εἶναι Ἀρχεπτόλεμον καὶ Ἀντιφῶντα καὶ γένος τὸ ἐκ τούτοιν, καὶ νόθους καὶ γνησίους· καὶ ἐάν τις ποιήσηταί τινα τῶν ἐξ Ἀρχεπτολέμου καὶ Ἀντιφῶντος, ἄτιμος ἔστω ὁ ποιησάμενος. ταῦτα δὲ γράψαι ἐν στήλῃ χαλκῇ· καὶ ἧπερ ἀνάκειται τὰ ψηφίσματα τὰ περὶ Φρυνίχου, καὶ τοῦτο θέσθαι.

Archeptolemus, son of Hippodamus, of Agrylē, and Antiphon, son of Sophilus, of Rhamnus, both being present in the court, were found guilty of treason. The sentence passed on them was that they should be handed over to the Eleven for execution; that their belongings should be confiscated and ten percent of them should be given to the Goddess; that their houses should be torn down and boundary-stones should be set up on their sites with the inscription "Land of Archeptolemus and Antiphon the two traitors"; and that the two demarchs should make a declaration of their property; and that it should be forbidden to bury Archeptolemus and Antiphon at Athens or in any place ruled by the Athenians; and that Archeptolemus and Antiphon should be deprived of their citizen rights, and so should their descendants legitimate and illegitimate; and that if anyone adopts any descendant of Archeptolemus or Antiphon, he should also be deprived of his citizen rights; and that this should be inscribed on a bronze tablet, which is to be set up where the decrees relating to Phrynichus are placed.

(trans. FOWLER 1936, slightly revised)

See Karakantza 2022b:211–212 and 212n11; the passage is discussed at length by Velaoras in this volume (pp. 115–126).

46 Bosnakis 2020:241; see also his contribution to this volume.

47 Bosnakis 2020:252.

48 Bosnakis 2020:251.

> The corpse arrived on a balmy summer afternoon. Neither the ambulance driver nor the cemetery workers knew the identity of the deceased, whose unwashed, bloodied body was shrouded in mystery and a simple white cloth. No prayers or religious incantations were uttered as workers lowered the body into an unmarked, anonymous grave. No friends or family members were present to witness the burial. The only onlookers were a pack of stray dogs who languidly roamed the rock-strewn fields of the hastily constructed cemetery. The body, that of thirty-four-year-old military captain Mehmet Karabekir, was not to be mourned.[49]

The construction of the cemetery was the idea of Istanbul's then mayor, who complemented this idea with the following vitriolic words:

> Those who pass by should curse them. They cannot escape hell but we must also make them suffer in their graves.[50]

Another Turkish scholar, Ege Selin Islekel, begins her paper "Absent Death: Necropolitics and Technologies of Mourning" with the paradigm of a trash area near the town Siirt in eastern Turkey called the 'River of Butchers'. Between 1984 and 1991 the place was used to dispose of the bodies of those who had disappeared in the notorious fight 'against terror'. It is estimated that there are more than 300 bodies lying there; while the 'River of Butchers' is one of the 253 identified mass grave sites in Turkey which probably 'host' more than 3,485 bodies in total. The families who were notified around 1988 that their children had been 'disposed' of in the 'River of Butchers' were not allowed to retrieve the remains so as to identify the bodies and give them a proper burial.[51]

The above are two examples of pronounced necropolitical treatment from the recent past that corroborate the basic characteristics of the degraded and insulted dead found in archaeological and literary evidence from Greek antiquity, to which I will return now.

Once he was dead, it was not allowed to give the body of Ajax a proper burial; his family and friends were not allowed to lament him either. In the 'heated' debate between Teucer and Menelaus (in the fourth episode) we hear the arguments of the sovereign(s) for excepting a political adversary from burial and thus further dishonouring him:

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49 Balkan 2019:232.

50 As reported in Balkan 2019:232.

51 Islekel 2017:337.

Ὧν οὕνεκ᾽ αὐτὸν οὔτις ἔστ᾽ ἀνὴρ σθένων
τοσοῦτον ὥστε σῶμα τυμβεῦσαι τάφῳ,
ἀλλ᾽ ἀμφὶ χλωρὰν ψάμαθον ἐκβεβλημένος
ὄρνισι φορβὴ παραλίοις γενήσεται.

εἰ γὰρ βλέποντος μὴ ᾽δυνήθημεν κρατεῖν,
πάντως θανόντος γ᾽ ἄρξομεν, κἂν μὴ θέλῃς,
χερσὶν *παρευθύνοντες*·

For that reason, there is no man strong enough to bury the body in a tomb. But cast out somewhere on the yellow sand, he will become food for the birds of the shore … For if we couldn't control him alive, at least we'll *master* him dead [literally: we'll exert our power over him], even if you're against it, *controlling* him in our hands.

Ajax 1062–1065, 1067–1068 (my emphasis)

So, Ajax is identified by Menelaus and Agamemnon as a political dissident, as someone who challenged the authority of the sovereign:

Καίτοι κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἄνδρα δημότην
μηδὲν δικαιοῦν τῶν ἐφεστώτων κλύειν.

It is the mark of a bad man if a commoner (ἀνὴρ δημότης) does not deign to listen to the authorities.

Ajax 1071–1072

Anēr dēmotēs is a pejorative term, denoting not a member of the citizen body, but an ordinary member of the *polloi*.[52] If this is so, then, with this wording, Ajax is excluded from the body of citizens and thus from the ensuing privileges of citizenship, which is what precisely happens in a state of exception: the legal protection of citizenship ceases to exist. Menelaus, then, proceeds to a general statement about the function of laws. Contrary to what is expected, it is not simply out of respect and restraint (*aidōs*) that the citizens obey the laws (the standard Athenian ideology), but it is fear that coerces their implementation; the same applies when it comes to disciplining the army. Four times is 'fear' evoked in the "harsher world of Menelaus' polity"; twice in the following passage:[53]

52 Jebb 1896 on line 1071; Finglass 2011 on lines 1071–1072; Stanford 1963 on line 1071; see also Jouanna 2018:316.

53 Finglass 2011:441–443 on lines 1073–1076.

Οὐ γάρ ποτ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἂν ἐν πόλει νόμοι καλῶς
φέροιντ᾽ ἄν, ἔνθα μὴ καθεστήκῃ δέος,
οὔτ᾽ ἂν στρατός γε σωφρόνως ἄρχοιτ᾽ ἔτι
μηδὲν φόβου πρόβλημα μηδ᾽ αἰδοῦς ἔχων.

> For the laws could never function properly in a city where *fear* is not firmly established, nor, for that matter, could an army be ruled with due consideration without the protection afforded by *fear* and restraint.[54]
>
> *Ajax* 1073–1076 (my emphasis)

Could this have sounded Lacedaemonian to Athenian ears, as Finglass suggests? Even if not Lacedaemonian, it definitely sounded more authoritarian than their democratic sensibilities allowed them to accept. Furthermore, there is another democratic procedure which is compromised in the story of Ajax: the court that decided on the Achillean arms was corrupted—according to Teucer (*Ajax* 1135) and according to most of the narratives recording this event in ancient literature.[55] The authoritarian denial of burial is continued by Agamemnon, who, after Ajax's death, disparagingly degrades his valour (1236–1237), his contribution to the common cause (1238), even his well-known trait as the bulwark of the Achaeans (1250–1252). The necropolitical tactics of degrading the dead are in full swing.

4 The Degraded Burial

Finally, burial is allowed by Agamemnon as a compromise to the demands of his 'friend' Odysseus. I have argued at length elsewhere that this burial of Ajax is done hastily and in a manner that contributes to further dishonouring the dead.[56] As mentioned earlier, archaeological finds have given us a wide array of degrading and insulting burials. In the case of Ajax, we have nothing near

54 See also the occurrence of the word δέος in lines 1079 and 1084.

55 I have discussed the various narratives of the 'Judgement of Arms' and the mingling of goddess Athena or Odysseus in falsifying the results (like in Pindar *Nemean* 8.23–34; *Isthmian* 4.35–36) in Karakantza 2010:3–4 and Karakantza 2023:12n25. In the story of Teucer, it is purely human intervention—that of Menelaus—that changed the results in favour of Odysseus, a 'lesser' hero in terms of bravery and heroic valour.

56 In a yet unpublished paper subtitled "Harming Enemies and Helping Friends," which will come as Part 2 of "Sophocles' Ajax as the Iliadic Achilles in the Extreme" (= Karakantza 2023), I argue that there is nothing heroic in the hasty and rudimentary burial of the

the splendour of a heroic burial that comprises the cremation of the hero on a grandiose pyre and then the burial of the urn or the larnax with the bones in a tomb (like the burials of Patroclus and Hector in the *Iliad*). Instead, we have an interment in a coffin in a hole (trench) opened in the ground.[57] The main concern of Teucer, before the burial itself is performed, is to hasten the procedure before the enemies of the great hero get hold of the body. To this, the chorus also agrees:

μὴ τεῖνε μακράν, ἀλλ' ὅπως κρύψεις τάφῳ
φράζου τὸν ἄνδρα, χὤ τι μυθήσῃ τάχα.
βλέπω γὰρ ἔχθρὸν φῶτα …

Do not stretch out your speech but consider how you will conceal this man in a grave, and what you will say in a moment. For I see an enemy …

Ajax 1040–1042

And again, a few lines later:

ἀλλ' ὡς δύνασαι, Τεῦκρε, ταχύνας
σπεῦσον κοίλην κάπετόν τιν' ἰδεῖν
τῷδ' …

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still-bleeding hero here. Sophocles, to my mind, wanted to leave out any sentiment of redemption of the fallen hero. The same opinion is held by Finglass 2011:48–51.

57 In the *Little Iliad* it is said that Ajax was not cremated but put in a coffin because of the anger of the king (Agamemnon): ὁ τὴν μικρὰν Ἰλιάδα γράψας ἱστορεῖ μηδὲ καυθῆναι συνήθως τὸν Αἴαντα, τεθῆναι δὲ οὕτως ἐν σορῷ διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν τοῦ βασιλέως 'The writer of the *Little Iliad* records that Ajax was not cremated in the usual way either, but placed in a coffin as he was, because of the king's anger' (trans. West). In this passage, it is obvious that choosing inhumation over cremation, which was the usual practice, was an act of dishonouring the dead Ajax. Holt 1992 argues, however, that inhumation as a funerary practice was not necessarily a lesser or non-honorific practice since both "cremation and inhumation were practiced side by side" (322) in different places and over different periods of times. He suggests that inhumation regarded as disgraceful must have been invented *ad hoc* (323) by the poet of the *Little Iliad*. His assumption is that inhumation is an old-style funeral which is associated with Ajax because he is an old hero of the epic tradition (324–325) that retains some of his old-fashioned characteristics like his seven-oxen-hide tower-like shield. However, it is obvious that the burial of Ajax here is degraded, as I will argue shortly. See also Apollodorus (*Epitome* 5.7), who confirms that the interment of Ajax is a 'novelty' of a practice for a Homeric hero due to the anger of Agamemnon, thus a degraded practice.

> Come on now, to the best of your ability, Teucer, make haste and hurry to see to a hollow trench for this man …
>
> *Ajax* 1164–1166

The word (σ)κάπετον clearly means something which is simply 'dug up'—a trench or a hallow in the earth which could serve as a grave. In line 1165, there is neither any laudatory nuance, nor an allusion to the later heroization of the hero.[58] True, in the lines that follow (1166–1167) the grave (τάφος) is further described by two adjectives, ἀείμνηστος (1166) and εὐρώεις (1167). The latter simply denotes 'dank' (less likely 'vast')[59] and it is commonly used to describe Hades. The former might allude to the honourable and ritual status that the hero later acquired in Athenian society. However, even if it does (which I truly doubt in this passage) the burial procedure is totally undermined by the hastiness of the action and the rudimentary means which are used.

In the very final lines of the Sophoclean play, Teucer speeds up the procedure (1402–1404), ordering the members of the chorus to actually use their bare hands to dig a hole in the ground and bury the body:

> ἅλις· ἤδη γὰρ πολὺς ἐκτέταται
> χρόνος. ἀλλ᾽ οἱ μὲν κοίλην κάπετον
> χερσὶ ταχύνετε …
>
> Enough—for already much time has been drawn out. But some men quickly prepare (ready) a hollow trench with your hands …
>
> *Ajax* 1403–1404

So, for Ajax, an interment, and *not* the expected cremation, is reserved, and this is the mark of a degraded dead. In the *Little Iliad*, as well as in the *Epitome* of Apollodorus (5.7), the interment in a coffin is justified by the anger of Agamemnon:[60] the leader of the army is the one who ordained that this dead must be buried as if he were an enemy, a traitor of the Achaeans, a dishonoured dead.

This hasty and degrading burial must have come as a shock to the Athenian audience of the 5th century BCE because Ajax was one of their venerated her-

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58 Contrary to Henrichs 1993:169–171. Similarly, I disagree with Easterling 1988:98 and March 1991–1993:1–4. For the burial see also Burian 1972; Winnington-Ingram 1980; Davidson 1985; Holt 1992; and all major works on the play (*passim*): Garvie 1998; Finglass 2011; Finglass 2012; Jouanna 2018. Finally, Murnagham 2020:184n34.

59 Finglass 2011 on lines 1166–1167.

60 See n. 57 above.

oes, the hero who was summoned when pressing need arose,[61] one of the eponymous heroes of the ten Cleisthenic political tribes, and a cult-hero of the Athenians.[62] His statue stood in the civic centre of the city, in the ancient agora.[63] His tribe, the Aiantis tribe, was offered special honours during the Persian Wars: members of the Aiantis tribe were posted honourably on the right wing at the battle of Marathon and, because of their excellence at the battle of Plataea, it was men of this tribe that offered the victory sacrifice to the Nymphs at Cithairon (Plutarch *Moralia* 628e–f).

The uneasiness that the audience must have felt was eased, perhaps, by the knowledge that *their* hero, who was lying—a mere degraded corpse—in the middle of the theatrical stage, was honoured in 'real' life as one of the most important political heroes of democratic Athens. And yet, this degradation that the Athenians had experienced in the dramatic time of the performance was an eloquent comment on all the similar cases that they witnessed in civil wars or political upheavals in their *polis*, and on all the necropolitical violence that they inflicted on their rebellious allies as the hegemonic power of the Hellenes of their time. Such were the cases, in their foreign affairs, of the Melians, the Mytilenians, and the Samian dissidents, who were tried and executed.[64] Such was the case, in the interior politics, of the infamous Assembly of May 411 BCE, when the *polis* was declared in a state of emergency; democratic laws were annulled; the vast majority of the body politic was deprived of its political rights; and large numbers of democratic citizens were terrorized, persecuted, and killed.[65] And, finally, such might have been the case of those degraded and insulted dead across the ancient world in the mass graves unearthed by archaeologists. Similar discoveries in the future might reveal thus far unknown cases of necropolitical treatment and a harsher political reality than the one we usually have in mind.

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61 Just before the naval battle of Salamis, the Athenians summon Ajax and his father Telamon from Salamis, and Aiakos and the Aiakides from Aegina (Herodotus 8.64). When the battle was over, the Greeks dedicated one Phoenician trireme to Ajax in Salamis (Herodotus 8.121).

62 The Aianteia is his festival on Salamis, celebrated with procession and contests; "Athenian epheboi used to adorn a couch with a full set of arms and armour in honour of Ajax" (March 1991–1993:3n21).

63 The archaeologically attested monument of the eponymous heroes dates to the mid-fourth century and Pausanias must be referring to this one in his description of the *agora* (1.5.1–3). However, it is very likely that a similar one existed at least since the last quarter of the 5th century, about fifty metres south of the fourth-century monument (see Aristophanes *Knights* 977–980 and *Peace* 1183–1184 with Wycherley 1957:86; Shear 1970:203–207).

64 Karakantza 2022b:212–213.

65 Karakantza 2022b:210–211.

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CHAPTER 5

Enacting Necropolitics in Sophocles' *Antigone*

Zina Giannopoulou

> If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.
>
> E.M. FORSTER, "What I Believe" (1938)

• • •

> Politics is not made up of power relationships;
> it is made up of relationships between worlds.
>
> JACQUES RANCIÈRE, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1999 [1995])

⁘

1 Introduction

The story of Sophocles' *Antigone* is well-known.[1] Having lost father, mother, and two brothers, Antigone lives in a Thebes ruled by her uncle, Creon, who prohibits by law the burial of one of her brothers, Polyneices, on the grounds that he was a traitor to his city. Antigone defies that law, buries her brother, is apprehended, and is sentenced by Creon to live entombment. She commits suicide in the tomb where she is subsequently joined by Haemon, her fiancé and Creon's son, who also commits suicide. By the end of the play, Creon is all alone, having lost both wife and son, praying for his own death.

The play is a sustained meditation on the uses of life and death, as well as on the porous boundary between the two, where life shades into death, and death generates life. It is also a dramatic commentary on the political

1 I delivered an earlier version of this paper at the invitation of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal in Durban, South Africa in early 2022. I thank the audience for their helpful questions and comments. I owe thanks to Danielle Allen, Kinch Hoekstra, Stathis Kalyvas, and Gabe Rockhill for stimulating conversations on ancient and modern political theory, which fuelled my interest in a necropolitical reading of *Antigone*.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_006

uses of space in relation to the human body, both living and dead. The play opens with Polyneices' corpse lying above the earth and ends with Antigone buried alive in a rocky tomb—both decisions of the sovereign Creon, who arbitrates that a piece of land and a deep-dug cave will house an unhallowed corpse and a living corpse, respectively. There is also a third corpse, that of Haemon, "a corpse for a corpse" (1067), housed in the same rocky cave as Antigone's corpse, and a fourth corpse, that of Creon's wife, Eurydice, also a corpse for a corpse since her suicide is prompted by pain over her son's death.[2]

A play that teems with corpses, heaped by "the stubborn wrongs, death-laden, of an ill-thinking mind" (φρενῶν δυσφρόνων ἁμαρτήματα / στερεὰ θανατό-εντ', 1261–1262), a mind fuelled by a politics of enmity and separation, *Antigone* seems ideally suited to a necropolitical reading. The term 'necropolitics' was defined by the Cameroonian historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe in an article published in English in 2003 and republished as part of a book in 2019.[3] It refers to the ways in which contemporary politics regulates and maximizes death. Although in its early days necropolitics accounted for social formations, such as the plantation, the colony, and the war zone, in which life was subjected to the powers of death, it soon became an exciting theoretical tool for the study of gendered deaths and various states of exception. Necropolitics can be used to analyse not only the powerful presence of death in contemporary socio-political systems, but also the ways in which death-machines are organized, regulated, and enforced.[4]

In what follows, I propose a necropolitical reading of *Antigone* that spans the entire play and structures it around four pillars or conceptual tools of necropolitics: the enmity/friendship polarity; the enemy's physical elimination; the use of space for the creation of death-worlds; and the suicide bomber as a figure of resistance to necropower. Antigone, Creon, and Haemon, I argue, manifest either all or some of these pillars, of their own accord or in response to another's actions, prior to Antigone's entombment and/or after it. Like the plague afflicting Thebes as the result of its king's lack of prudence, Creon's necropower infects his son and niece, who appropriate its idiom only better to subvert it. In Section 2, I lay out the theoretical framework of necropolitics with special emphasis on the four pillars stated above. In Sections 3 and 4, I apply

2 All quotations from *Antigone* are from the Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990 OCT edition of Sophocles' *Antigone*. English translations are a mixture of Blondell 1998, Grene 1991, and my own.

3 All references to Mbembe's necropolitics come from the book.

4 See the Introduction to this volume for a brief survey of necropolitics.

these pillars to the parts of the play before Antigone is sent to the tomb and while she is entombed, respectively. I end with conclusions in Section 5.

2 Necropolitics as Theoretical Frame

Mbembe's account of necropolitics belongs to what may be loosely called 'biopolitical studies', critical approaches to biopolitics which fault its insufficient account of the presence of death in contemporary global and colonial politics. Critics of biopolitics study its implications, limits, and possible transformations. Some have looked at the ways in which life operates in biopolitics. Giorgio Agamben, for instance, explores how life in biopolitics is torn between life that is sacred and life that can be sacrificed (1998). Sovereign power enforces a state of exception in which human beings are reduced to bare life (*zoē*) without access to political life (*bios*). The juridical order suspends itself, produces the exception of bare life, and then legitimizes itself via an appeal to it.[5] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri use the concept of biopower to point to the transformations of capital in postmodern societies and press the need for another biopolitical future (2000). Other critics of biopolitics focus on what Foucault calls the 'death function' of biopolitics, i.e. racism. Racism here works as a technique of biopolitics that justifies the power to kill by splitting the population "between what must live and what must die."[6] Life becomes murderous in detention centres, asylums, immigration policies, areas of state-sanctioned anti-black violence, and other spaces where death takes place alongside the protection and production of certain kinds of life.[7]

For Mbembe thinking of biopolitics in the contemporary sphere and illuminating its colonial and post-colonial aspects require considering "the ways in which the political takes as its primary and absolute objective the enemy's murder, doing so under the guise of war, resistance, or the war on terror." Sovereignty aims at "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations."[8] The right to kill is legitimated by an appeal to the exception, emergency, and fictionalized notion of the enemy as a threatening Other whose physical extinction secures those

5 For readings of *Antigone* inflected by biopolitics see, for instance, Butler 2000; Butler 2010; Fradinger 2010:59–60; Honig 2010:27n5; Žukauskaitė 2010; Tripathy 2013; and Karakantza 2022.

6 Foucault 1997:254.

7 For recent studies that focus on the relation between racism and biopolitics see Dilts 2014; Bargu 2014; and Erlenbusch-Anderson 2018.

8 Mbembe 2019:66, 68.

in power.[9] Whereas for Agamben, the threshold beyond which life ceases to be politically relevant and becomes bare life is the concentration camp,[10] for Mbembe colonies are the sites where biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege all come together. He agrees with Frantz Fanon that colonial occupation creates new spatial relations which divide people into groups and govern them by the principle of "reciprocal exclusivity."[11] Space thus becomes emblematic of sovereignty since "sovereignty meant occupation, and occupation meant relegating the colonized to a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood."[12]

Necropower is the power to subjugate life to the force of death. It aims to maximize death, both quantitively and qualitatively, and works by denying certain subjects, communities and populations their participation in political life. Like colonial occupation, it works through spatial dynamics by physically separating those who matter from those who are disposable. It places the latter in 'death-worlds', social formations in which entire populations are subjected to "conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the *living dead*."[13] It also allocates to them precarity, not as an existential category "that is presumed to be equally shared," but "as a condition of induced inequality and destitution."[14] This artificial precarity forges an ontologically suspended mode of existence that is difficult to capture in speech. Butler poignantly describes the difficulty of articulating the paradox of the 'inhuman inhumanity' that characterizes the world of the living dead:

> Indeed, how are we to grasp this dilemma of language that emerges when 'human' takes on that doubled sense, the normative one based on radical exclusion and the one that emerges in the sphere of the excluded, *not negated, not dead, perhaps slowly dying, yes, surely dying from a lack of recognition, dying, indeed, from the premature circumscription of the norms by which recognition as human can be conferred*, a recognition without which the human cannot come into being but must remain on the far side of

9 Mbembe is influenced by Carl Schmitt here, who in the interwar period famously identified the political with the friend–enemy distinction "as the utmost degree of intensity of a union or disassociation" (Schmitt 1996:26). The sovereign here decides who the enemy is and what to do about the enmity, and response to the friend–enemy condition is the defining action of the political.

10 Agamben 1998:168–171.

11 Fanon 1991:39.

12 Mbembe 2019:79.

13 Mbembe 2019:92.

14 Butler and Athanasiou 2013:20.

> being, as what does not quite qualify as that which is and can be? Is this not a melancholy of the public sphere?[15]

Necropower traffics in human life that is deathlike or, inversely, in human death that is lifelike. It has three characteristics. First, territorial fragmentation seals off settlements, creating forms of apartheid in which all movement is impossible. Second, vertical sovereignty structures space so that airspace is separated from the ground on a top/bottom hierarchy. These two features result in occupational splintering, manifested in seclusion and in the control, surveillance, and separation of the populations designated as disposable. The third feature of necropower is infrastructural or siege warfare, such as bulldozing, which aims systematically to sabotage the enemy's infrastructure.[16] All three characteristics show that necropower uses space in order to control 'the living dead'. It places the dispossessed in sealed off territories, deprives them of the basic human conditions for living, and methodically engineers their physical destruction. As Athena Athanasiou writes, "the violent logic of dispossession … challenges [displaced and displaceable] subjectivities to take their proper place [of non-being] instead of taking place."[17]

For Mbembe, resistance to necropower takes the form of martyrdom and is illustrated by the suicide bomber whose body becomes a weapon that effects homicide and suicide in one blow. As material entity, the martyr's body holds neither power nor value; rather "its power and value result from a process of abstraction based on the desire for eternity." Having overcome his own mortality, the martyr can be seen as "laboring under the sign of the future"; he forfeits the present for the future. Once his body has been reduced to "malleable matter," it acquires meaning from "a transcendental *nomos* outside it. The besieged body becomes a piece of metal whose function is to bring eternal life into being through sacrifice. The body duplicates itself and, in death, literally and metaphorically, escapes the state of siege and occupation."[18] By becoming both victim and victimizer, the suicide bomber destroys a valueless body for the sake of a value located beyond it. Echoing Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, Mbembe writes that here death "can be represented as agency. For death is precisely that from and over which I have power. But it is also the space where freedom and negation operate."[19]

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15 Butler 2000:81—emphasis added.
16 Mbembe 2019:80–83.
17 Butler and Athanasiou 2013:20.
18 Mbembe 2019:90.
19 Mbembe 2019:91–92.

Our discussion of necropolitics as methodological frame reveals four conceptual tools for a necropolitical reading of *Antigone*, as mentioned earlier: the enmity/friendship polarity; the enemy's physical elimination; the use of space for the creation of death-worlds; and the suicide bomber as a figure of resistance to necropower. It is time we saw how they apply to a holistic reading of the play, first in relation to the events prior to the cave, and then in relation to Antigone and Haemon's suicides inside the cave.

3 Necropolitics Prior to the Cave

Antigone belongs to an intellectual culture which, as John Davies observes, is preoccupied with the question, "who is to be, and who is not to be, in the Athenian political community, and why?"[20] After Oedipus' death and the mutual killing of Eteocles and Polyneices, Creon exercises absolute political authority in Thebes, construed by the chorus as the power to use every law over the living and the dead (213–214). This description follows Creon's declaration at 173 that ἐγὼ κράτη δὴ πάντα καὶ θρόνους ἔχω 'I hold every power and the throne' (cf. 173, 191, 207–210). Creon's sovereignty allows him to exile or execute whomever he pleases—he is a *tyrannos*, a word that "emphasizes [his] absolute power, conferred on him by the *polis* in the emergency."[21]

Creon has founded his power on a rigid conception of friend and enemy. He has ordained that Eteocles, who died as "the city's champion" (194), should be buried, but Polyneices who "sought to burn with fire from top to bottom his native city and the gods of his own people" (200–201) should be left unwept and unburied. Creon ranks any form of interpersonal friendship as inferior to state-allegiance (182–190): he has no regard for those who consider another man more 'a friend' than their own country and would not count "any enemy of [his] country as a friend" (183, 187; cf. 209–210). For him, friendship entails political alliance, and personal ties must not be allowed to interfere with the well-being of the *polis*. Polyneices is "still [his] enemy, even in death" (522), and so is Antigone, whom in his exchange with Haemon he calls "a hateful creature" (τὸ μῖσος, 760) and orders that she should be brought out and killed right next to her fiancé. For Creon, friends are constituted by an identifiable and unified *external* threat—they are political allies, whereas enemies are political

20 Davies 1977:106.

21 Knox 1964:63. Earlier Creon has been variously called "king" (*basileus*, 155), "lord" (*anax*, 223, 278), "general" (*stratēgos*, 8), and "tyrant" (*tyrannos*, 60). See Winnington-Ingram 1980:126: "Creon is a tyrant … or well on his way to be a tyrant."

adversaries; friends may be buried—they are included among those benefitting from the law of burying the dead—whereas enemies are denied burial—they are excluded from those to whom the law of burial applies.

Antigone dismisses Creon's friend/enemy distinction in the name of equality among the dead and proclaims herself devoted to the ties of kin-*philia*. Ancient Greek friendship (*philia*) is broader than its English equivalent, extending to anyone with whom one has a relationship of mutual obligation. Chief among such 'friends' are one's close family members, and this is the brand of friendship to which Antigone is fiercely committed (523). Her *philia* fuels her devotion to Polyneices. She says that the god of death demands the same funeral rites for both ally and traitor of the city and asserts, most famously, that her nature is to join in love, not hate (523).[22] Antigone's friend-rhetoric is one of inclusivity—her *philia* is reserved for Polyneices alone, but this is the aspect of friendship endangered by Creon, and as such it gets her exclusive attention.

The political use of space is perhaps the most important feature of necropower. The obvious example of a death-world as a spatial formation is Antigone's tomb, which I examine in the next section. Here I suggest that there is also another kind of death-world in the play, one occupied by both Creon and Antigone and a direct result of Creon's necropolitical power. This is a *mental* death-world, a psychic state in which the protagonists experience themselves either as suspended between life and death and/or as dead.[23] Although Mbembe writes about physical death-worlds, his focus on induced conditions of life that make certain groups or populations disposable may usefully be applied to the psyche in the context of *Antigone*. This is because Thebes as a whole is a kind of death-world, a sick city whose altars and sacrificial hearths are filled with the flesh of Polyneices' corpse, its prayers and offerings to the gods are rejected, and its birds are so stuffed with the dead man's bloody fat that they can no longer give clear sacrificial signs (1015–1022)—all this because of Creon's "sickness" (ταύτης σὺ μέντοι τῆς νόσου πλήρης ἔφυς, 1052), his lack of good counsel (μὴ φρονεῖν, 1051). In a city made sick by a sick king, Creon and Antigone live as mentally sick people, ghostly entities who either enforce bad laws and/or suffer their deadly consequences. City and citizens thus mirror one another—both are 'the living dead', materially (both barely functioning and on the verge of extinction) or mentally (citizens who are psychically dead).

When, for example, Antigone talks to her sister, Ismene, who is eager to share her death, she says:

22 For the enemy/friend polarity in Sophocles see Blundell 1989.

23 On this point, see the brilliant connection between *Antigone* and László Nemes' *Son of Saul* in Karakantza 2023:86–88.

θάρσει. σὺ μὲν ζῇς, ἡ δ᾽ ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι
τέθνηκεν ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὠφελεῖν.

Take heart, you are alive, but my life died long ago, to serve the dead.

Antigone 559–560[24]

Having sentenced Antigone to death, Creon says to Ismene about her still living sister and in the latter's presence, οὐ γὰρ ἔστ᾽ ἔτι 'she no longer exists' (567). As Antigone goes to meet her doom, she is painfully aware of her liminality:

… ἀλλά μ᾽ ὁ παγ-
κοίτας Ἅιδας ζῶσαν ἄγει
τὰν Ἀχέροντος
ἀκτάν …

… I am alive but Hades who gives sleep to everyone is leading me to the shores of Acheron …

Antigone 810–813

Soon thereafter the chorus reinforces her liminal state:

ἀλλ᾽ αὐτόνομος ζῶσα μόνη δὴ
θνητῶν Ἀίδην καταβήσῃ.

It was your own choice and alone among mankind you will descend, alive, to that world of death.

Antigone 821–822

The word αὐτόνομος suggests that in rebelling against Creon's sovereign *nomos* Antigone observes 'her own *nomos*', self-rule or private sovereignty.[25] In ancient Greece, *nomos* ranged "from law as a political enactment to a custom or habit which may or may not have absolute validity, and from the rules of a game to that ordered society on which civilized existence rests."[26] Based on the etymo-

24 Cf. 871.

25 As Griffith notes, this is the earliest occurrence of the word which soon became a term for "a weaker state which tries to exert its independence" (1999:268 s.v.). Αὐτόνομος here is used similarly to αὐτόγνωτος 'self-willed' as a qualification of Antigone's 'temper' (ὀργά) at 875.

26 Oswald 1965:120.

logical derivation of *nomos*, Schmitt claims that the term was originally and fundamentally a *spatial* one denoting 'division' and 'pasture', and thus it "is the immediate form in which the political and social order of a people becomes spatially visible."[27] From this viewpoint, an autonomous Antigone is the spatialization or physical embodiment of her will made visible. The chorus alludes to her physicality when they associate her autonomy with "having lived" (ζῶσα) a life dedicated to the dead—their use of ζάω, instead of βιόω, properly designates 'animal life' or 'mere existence'.[28] Antigone's own *nomos* is her creaturely life, a life dedicated to those deprived of life whom she will soon join in their death-world that is the underworld.[29] She exercises her autonomy only for the sake of Polyneices since, as she says, she would not defy civic orders to bury a replaceable husband or child, only her unique brother (900–920). This "law of the instant," as Judith Butler calls it, is "no law at all in any ordinary, generalizable sense,"[30] but the expression of a contingent *self-regulation* with a specific and unrepeatable application which nonetheless "assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law."[31]

Antigone again asserts her liminality, this time using a political term and emphatically repeating her paradoxical state:

850 ἰὼ δύστανος, βροτοῖς
οὔτε ⟨νεκρὸς⟩ νεκροῖσιν
μέτοικος, οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσιν.

> Neither among the living nor the dead do I have a home in common—neither with the living nor the dead.
>
> *Antigone* 850–852

Commenting on these lines and the repetition of μέτοικος at 868 and 890, Charles Segal writes that the phrasing is "almost a refrain" which "evokes [Antigone's] emotional suffering as she recognizes, more and more fully, her isolation."[32] Her aloneness is captured by a paradoxical phrase that both affirms and negates a *spatially* located existence: Antigone 'shares a home with' neither

27 Schmitt 2006:48.

28 See Weiner 2015 for an examination of the use of *bios–zoē* in *Antigone* from within Agamben's biopolitical frame.

29 As we shall see in the next section, the chorus' use of αὐτόνομος for Antigone here anticipates her suicide in the cave, her last autonomous act in the play.

30 Butler 2000:10.

31 Butler 2000:11.

32 Gibbons and Segal 2003:150. See also Holt 1999:668.

the living nor the dead—she is *a-topos* yet a fully embodied being on stage.[33] The word *metoikos* casts her 'in-betweenness' in political terms: in fifth-century Athens, the term denoted a resident alien, i.e. a non-Athenian who lived in Athens without civic rights. The *metoikos* Antigone is not a resident among the dead and at the same time she is disenfranchised from the living.

In her final *rhēsis*, while she is being led away by the servants, Antigone uses a tricolon crescendo with anaphora (ὦ … ὦ … ὦ) to address the same room as "tomb," "bridal chamber," and "permanent home," showing that she already experiences herself mentally as dead, a bride, and a home-resident:

> ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, ὦ κατασκαφὴς
> οἴκησις ἀείφρουρος, οἷ πορεύομαι
> πρὸς τοὺς ἐμαυτῆς …
>
> Tomb, bridal chamber, eternal prison dug in rock, it is to you I am going to join my people …
>
> *Antigone* 891–893

And toward the end of her lament, she once again turns to her liminality: ζῶσ' ἐς θανόντων ἔρχομαι κατασκαφάς 'I come living to the caverns of the dead' (920). All these references make clear that, ever since Antigone decided to bury Polyneices in defiance of Creon's law, she has been living in a mental death-world populated by the conviction that she died long ago and by a vivid projection of Hades leading her, like a groom his bride, to the shores of Acheron. What is relevant to my necropolitical reading of the play is that Antigone's anticipations of her punishment are spatialized with two of them being images of her future rocky house (κατασκαφὴς οἴκησις ἀείφρουρος, κατασκαφάς). In two more, she casts herself as a 'dweller' even though she makes no mention of the tomb: she is *autonomos*, the self-regulated space of a will to bury her brother, and a *metoikos* neither with the living nor with the dead. These two words convey Antigone's existential awareness as occupant of a *self*-centred space that is either assimilated to her unique will or is an a-social space with only her as denizen.[34]

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33 Cf. Butler 2000:78: "How do we understand this strange place of being between life and death, of speaking precisely from that vacillating boundary? If she is dead in some sense and yet speaks, she is precisely the one with no place who nevertheless seeks to claim one within speech, the unintelligible as it emerges within the intelligible, a position within kinship that is no position."

34 Antigone moves in a "terrifying vacuum," as Bernard Knox 1964:5 puts it, in complete isola-

Creon is also psychologically murky. His political status is the first to crumble. When Haemon tells him that the entire city of Thebes agrees with Antigone's decision to bury her brother, the following exchange transpires between them:

ΚΡ. πόλις γὰρ ἡμῖν ἁμὲ χρὴ τάσσειν ἐρεῖ;
735 ΑΙ. ὁρᾷς τόδ' ὡς εἴρηκας ὡς ἄγαν νέος;
ΚΡ. ἄλλῳ γὰρ ἢ 'μοὶ χρή με τῆσδ' ἄρχειν χθονός;
ΑΙ. πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἔσθ' ἥτις ἀνδρός ἐσθ' ἑνός.
ΚΡ. οὐ τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἡ πόλις νομίζεται;
ΑΙ. καλῶς ἐρήμης γ' ἂν σὺ γῆς ἄρχοις μόνος.

CR. Should the city tell me how I am to rule them?
H. Do you see what a young man's words these are of yours?
CR. Must I rule the land by someone else's judgment rather than my own?
H. There is no city possessed by one man only.
CR. Is not the city thought to be the ruler's?
H. You would be a fine dictator of a desert.

Antigone 734–739

Creon sees Thebes as his possession and a Thebes devoid of citizens makes him the possessor of a desert. Haemon's sarcastic comment responds to Creon's escalating insolence, but it also implies that his father's solipsism erodes his sovereignty. A ruler needs subjects since without them ruler and subject collapse into each other, and the hierarchical order supporting Creon's tyranny disintegrates. The comparison of the city to a desert makes horizontal and open the vertical and closed power-structure of tyrant/subject. It also isolates Creon, both spatially and socially, in a grim premonition of Antigone's isolation in her tomb.

The report of Antigone's and Haemon's suicides initiates Creon's existential crisis. The messenger praises the king's rule after Oedipus' death but bemoans his current situation:

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tion from a social community. She is severed from Ismene, Creon, and all humanity in the manner of her death, for, as Creon says, she "alone among mortals will go living in Hades" (821–822). The language of the play creates and reinforces her isolation. Creon speaks of Antigone as μόνη (508, 656), the chorus doubles the isolation by instructing the guards to leave her μόνην ἐρῆμον 'alone and deserted' (887) in the tomb, and she calls herself ἐρῆμος πρὸς φίλων 'bereft of friends' (919).

καὶ γὰρ ἡδοναὶ
ὅταν προδῶσιν ἀνδρός, οὐ τίθημ᾽ ἐγὼ
ζῆν τοῦτον, ἀλλ᾽ ἔμψυχον ἡγοῦμαι νεκρόν.

When even a man's pleasures let him down,
Then I no longer count him as alive—
I just consider him to be a living corpse.
Antigone 1165–1167

In an evocation of Tiresias' earlier request of Creon not to kill the dead twice by stabbing Polyneices' corpse (1029–1030), the king learns of his wife's suicide and 'doubles' his own deadness: αἰαῖ, ὀλωλότ᾽ ἄνδρ᾽ ἐπεξειργάσω 'It is a dead man you kill again' (1288). A little later, he asks his servants to lead him away, more a dead man than one alive:

ἰὼ πρόσπολοι,
ἄγετέ μ᾽ ὅτι τάχιστ᾽, ἄγετέ μ᾽ ἐκποδών,
τὸν οὐκ ὄντα μᾶλλον ἢ μηδένα.

Servants, lead me away quickly, quickly.
I am no more a live man than one dead.
Antigone 1320–1323

As a result of his decision to leave the dead Polyneices unburied and bury the living Antigone, Creon has come to share his relatives' paradoxical ontology. Like Polyneices, he is doubly dead, and like Antigone he is ἔμψυχος νεκρός, a living corpse. Both Creon and Antigone live in mental death-worlds: they are psychologically the 'living dead'.

4 Necropolitics in the Cave

Mbembe's necropolitics applies most spectacularly to Antigone's immurement outside the city. Having been persuaded by the chorus to save Antigone and bury Polyneices (1100–1101), Creon goes to Antigone's tomb and finds the girl having committed suicide. He beseeches Haemon to come out but it is too late. In silence, Haemon draws his sword and rushes at his father, seeing him as an enemy. He misses the mark and turns the sword upon himself. As he falls, he embraces Antigone, corpse upon corpse as bridegroom and wife, their wedding chamber a tomb.

The topography of the tomb is fascinating. In his commentary on the play, Mark Griffith suggests that the whole structure was half-natural (within the rock and earth, like a cave) and half-artificial (dug down, hollowed out, and with a mound on top) so that it could be viewed as both subterranean (κατώρυχι, 774; κατηρεφεῖ, 885; μετοικίας … τῆς ἄνω, 890; κατασκαφάς, 920; κάτω, 1068; ἐκ κατώρυχος στέγης / ἄνες, 1100–1101) and heaped-up (τυμβόχωστον, 848; χώματος, 1216). Antigone is put in a ready-made chamber-tomb (*tholos*) of Bronze Age type, cut into the side of the hill and accessed by a typically unroofed cutting (*dromos*) about ten to twenty metres long and sloping downward to the 'mouth' (*stomion*) of the chamber. Once she was inside, a stone wall must have sealed off the mouth.[35] The tomb's spatial structure showcases the three features of necropower. As a self-enclosed space set off from any other building, the tomb fragments the terrain, creating a sealed chamber that conceals Antigone (κρύψω, 774) and makes it impossible for her to move freely. As a subterranean space, it illustrates the top/bottom hierarchy of vertical sovereignty, spatializing the power-asymmetry between ruler and subject.[36] Occupational splintering manifests itself in Antigone's being separated from everyone else and secluded. Finally, infrastructural or siege warfare occurs as enforced starvation since Creon, in a symbolic evasion of responsibility, has left Antigone "just a little food, enough to let the city as a whole escape pollution" (775–776).

By immuring Antigone, Creon removes the girl from his dominion and places her under Hades' rule; one stern master yields to another, a transition evinced by Creon's sarcastic wish that "by praying to the only god that she reveres, Hades, [Antigone] may be spared from death" (777–778). Creon even stages a kind of competition between Haemon and Hades when he tells Ismene that Hades "will stop" his son and Antigone's marriage (Ἅιδης ὁ παύσων τούσδε τοὺς γάμους ἐμοί, 575). The idea that a girl who dies before marriage is marrying death is common in Athenian tragedy and in Greek culture generally. While lamenting her loss of a real marriage (e.g. 867–868, 876–882), Antigone views herself as being led away to become Hades' 'bride' (811–816; cf. 575, 654, 891, 1205), in a reversal or perversion of the wedding-procession she has been denied.[37] The way she speaks of Hades "putting her to sleep" also suggests "taking to bed," as a bridegroom takes a bride in marriage (811; cf. 805, 833). The verb

35 For the tomb's description I borrow from Griffith 1999:332.

36 Creon, of course, has already turned topsy-turvy the upper and the lower world by refusing to bury the dead Polyneices and by burying the living Antigone. This is a spatial restructuring of the earth that confounds the powers of the world above with those of the world below.

37 Cf. Rehm 1994:62–63.

'to lead', used in Antigone's lamentation (806–882), in her *rhēsis* (891–928), and in her final farewell (937–943), is the standard word for a husband 'leading' a woman from her father's house to his own in the ritual marriage procession. Twice the subject of these verbs is Creon (773, 916) as the one 'leading' Antigone to the tomb. This casts him as the girl's symbolic bridegroom soon to be replaced by Hades, her ritual bridegroom. In a triple crescendo of necropower, Creon and Hades are at once rulers, enforcers of death, and bridegrooms, while Antigone is a subject, a (living) dead, and a bride. In a display of gruesome eroticism, Creon asks his servants, whom he views as extensions of himself (773, 916), to "enfold [Antigone] in a rocky tomb" (κατηρεφεῖ τύμβῳ / περιπτύξαντες, 885–886) and leave her

> … μόνην ἐρῆμον, εἴτε χρῇ θανεῖν
> εἴτ᾽ ἐν τοιαύτῃ ζῶσα τυμβεύειν στέγῃ·
> ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἁγνοὶ τοὐπὶ τήνδε τὴν κόρην·
> μετοικίας δ᾽ οὖν τῆς ἄνω στερήσεται.
>
> Alone, solitary, to die if she so wishes
> Or live a buried life in such a home;
> we are guiltless in respect of her, this girl.
> But living above, among the rest of us, this life
> she shall certainly lose.
>
> *Antigone* 887–890

By connoting human 'embrace' and military 'encirclement', the verb περιπτύσσω 'to enfold' mixes marriage with war, and human limbs with rocky walls, turning a caress into an entombed life.

Yet contrary to Creon's will, Antigone is neither killed by nor married to Hades. In just six lines, the messenger reports her death and its effect on Haemon:

> … ἐν δὲ λοισθίῳ τυμβεύματι
> τὴν μὲν κρεμαστὴν αὐχένος κατείδομεν,
> βρόχῳ μιτώδει σινδόνος καθημμένην
> τὸν δ᾽ ἀμφὶ μέσσῃ περιπετῆ προσκείμενον,
> εὐνῆς ἀποιμώζοντα τῆς κάτω φθορὰν
> καὶ πατρὸς ἔργα καὶ τὸ δύστηνον λέχος.
>
> In the farthest recess of the tomb
> We saw the maiden hanging by her neck, tied up

there by a noose of finely woven cloth.
The boy had flung himself around her waist in close embrace
while he bemoaned his bridal-bed now ruined below,
his father's deeds and his unhappy marriage-bed.

Antigone 1220–1225

Instead of waiting to die while subsisting on the scraps of food that Creon has left her, Antigone takes her own life, hanging herself with part of her clothing, perhaps her veil or girdle, both symbols of wedding/funeral. Hanging is a frequent method of suicide for ancient Greek women, especially for maidens, since it leaves the body unpenetrated.[38] Her suicide is another instance of her autonomy in the sense that it is both a self-willed act and the visible embodiment of that will. Antigone's corpse becomes a spectacle looked at by Haemon, Creon, and the men who rush to the tomb to save her (κατείδομεν, 1221). Her suicide is also homicide, a hybrid that turns Antigone into Mbembe's martyr, the figure who sacrifices a valueless present for a valuable future. Mbembe's suicide bomber encodes Antigone's contempt for a spiritually deadened life, the sacrifice of her body for a transcendental meaning, the commitment to kinship and the eternal law of the chthonic gods. Her willed death annuls Creon's decision himself to release the girl from the tomb since it was he who had imprisoned her (1112). Haemon's treatment of his dead betrothed also subverts his father's necropower. His cries over her corpse invalidate the girl's earlier plaint that she will die "unwept, unfriended, unaccompanied by wedding song" (ἄκλαυτος, ἄφιλος, ἀνυμέναι- / ος, 876–877), his groans serving as both parodic wedding song and funeral lament. Finally, his body "falling around/embracing the girl around her waist" (ἀμφὶ μέσσῃ περιπετῆ, 1223) replaces Creon's choice of 'lover' for Antigone—the cold embrace of the tomb's walls—with the warmth of a human caress.

The emphasis on Antigone's corpse being seen as an object—Haemon's "ruined bridal-bed" (**εὐνῆς** … φθοράν, 1224) and "unhappy marriage-bed" (τὸ δύστηνον λέχος, 1225)—need not connote, as Griffith claims, her fiancé's "aspirations, and hence now the source of his uncontrollable rage,"[39] even if Antigone is subsequently all but forgotten by father and son whose encounter turns into a duel. Rather, the emphasis on the marriage-bed underscores Haemon's need to reclaim his thwarted marriage to Antigone, a need that puts the lie to Creon's cynical disparagement of their union when he told Ismene that "there are other

38 Cf. Loraux 1987:7–17, 31–32, 38.

39 Griffith 1999:335.

plots of land for [Haemon] to plow" (ἀρώσιμοι γάρ χἀτέρων εἰσίν γύαι, 569).[40] This is the only 'plot of land' that Haemon wants, and he is going to claim it as he breathes his last in a pathetic scene of repudiation of the father/son bond and perversion of marriage:

τὸν δ᾽ ἀγρίοις ὄσσοισι παπτήνας ὁ παῖς,
πτύσας προσώπῳ κοὐδὲν ἀντειπών, ξίφους
ἕλκει διπλοῦς κνώδοντας, ἐκ δ᾽ ὁρμωμένου
πατρὸς φυγαῖσιν ἥμπλακ᾽· εἶθ᾽ ὁ δύσμορος
αὑτῷ χολωθείς, ὥσπερ εἶχ᾽, ἐπενταθεὶς
ἤρεισε πλευραῖς μέσσον ἔγχος, ἐς δ᾽ ὑγρὸν
ἀγκῶν᾽ ἔτ᾽ ἔμφρων παρθένῳ προσπτύσσεται·
καὶ φυσιῶν ὀξεῖαν ἐκβάλλει ῥοὴν
λευκῇ παρειᾷ φοινίου σταλάγματος.
κεῖται δὲ νεκρὸς περὶ νεκρῷ, τὰ νυμφικὰ
τέλη λαχὼν δείλαιος ἔν γ᾽ Ἅιδου δόμοις,
δείξας ἐν ἀνθρώποισι τὴν ἀβουλίαν
ὅσῳ μέγιστον ἀνδρὶ πρόσκειται κακόν.

His son glared back at him with savage eyes,
Spat in his face, said nothing in reply, and drew his
Two-edged sword. His father rushed back to escape,
And Haemon missed his aim. At once, ill-fated boy, in anger
At himself, he tensed himself upon his sword-point
And drove half the blade into his side. Before his wits departed,
He embraced the maiden with a wilting arm; grasping, he spurted forth a sharp
Swift stream of bloody drops upon the girl's white cheek.
He lies there, corpse embracing corpse. He has received
His marriage rites at last, poor wretch, in Hades' house,
And demonstrated to the human race how far
Ill-counsel is the greatest evil for a man.

Antigone 1231–1243

40 Honig 2013:257 argues that by sexually consummating his union with Antigone after the latter's death Haemon appropriates Antigone, whose "loyalty, as her dirge and her suicide make clear, is not first and foremost to Haemon." Thus "Antigone's rejection of conventional marriage is undone by events that occur after her death." By contrast, I think that in the tomb Antigone and Haemon undermine Creon's necropower by serving different but

In this scene, Haemon's subversion of Creon's necropower unfolds in three stages. In the first stage, the son meets his father's supplication of him (ἱκέσιός σε λίσσομαι, 1230), itself a reversal of Creon's earlier dismissal of Haemon, with a savage look and a spit on his face (πτύσας προσώπῳ, 1232). The latter gesture of "extraordinary, almost sub-tragic, ferocity,"[41] is also a gesture of enmity that echoes and meets, with a different object, Creon's request of Haemon to "spit [Antigone] away just like an enemy" (ἀποπτύσας οὖν ὥστε δυσμενῆ μέθες, 653). Now Creon is the enemy, and as such he deserves to be spat on. Haemon thus both obeys and disobeys his father's order, simultaneously affirming and denying his power.

In the second stage, he tries to kill his father but misses the target because Creon steps back to avoid the blow. This is the second time Creon has had to retrace his steps in order to evade an enemy attack. The first time, Tiresias asks him to save Antigone from live immurement, and the chorus urges him to listen to the prophet's advice. Creon does not want to yield, but the unacceptable alternative would be "by standing firm to strike with ruin [his] proud heart" (ἀντιστάντα δὲ / Ἄτηι πατάξαι θυμὸν ἐν δεινῶι πάρα, 1096–1097).[42] Here, the king's "opponent" (ἀντιστάντα) is his heart or spirit, and by reneging on his decision to bury Antigone he aims to avoid the self-destruction of losing his heir/son as punishment for keeping a dead person above ground and a living one underground. Inside the tomb, however, his opponent is Haemon, and by dodging his son's attack, Creon escapes death and spares Haemon parricide.[43] Both times, Creon retreats to save himself via saving his son only to witness, the second time, his son committing suicide in front of him.

Haemon's suicide completely undoes Creon's necropower. The messenger describes the boy's death in a highly eroticized fashion. As he plunges the sword into his body and breathes his last, Haemon embraces Antigone, spurt-

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complementary goals: Antigone dies willingly, and Haemon ritualistically deprives Hades of a virgin-bride.

41 Griffith 1999:338.

42 Quoted lines follow the 1950 Budé edition by Dain and Mazon.

43 The messenger makes Haemon the focalizer of this part of the scene in the tomb—he is the character whose perspective the audience or reader of the play assumes. He tells us that the boy was angry at himself but not why he was angry—because he failed to kill his father or because he attempted to kill him or because he attempted to kill him *and* failed? All these are possible reasons. Yet it is also possible, and not merely charitable, that Creon stepped back not only in self-defence but also out of a wish to spare his son from committing parricide. His use of the word "child" (τέκνον, 1230) foregrounds the father–son relationship right before Haemon tries to strike him.

ing blood upon her cheek in an image that mixes defloration (the sword serving as phallic symbol) with ejaculation (blood standing for semen).[44] His marriage to Antigone is consummated right before he dies through a symbolic sexual act that turns his body into an impossible hybrid of penetrated-womb-*cum*-penetrating-phallus. This performative excess of gender concludes a scene in which Haemon's masculinity has come progressively under attack. His wailing over Antigone's corpse, silent anger at Creon's tyranny, futile attempt to kill/succeed his father, and decision to commit the mostly female act of suicide are all 'feminizing' traits. By exemplifying them, Haemon has targeted his father's brand of masculinity—being able to dismiss a woman in order to be loyal to his father. In the manner of his death, however, Haemon goes a step further by physically co-hosting aggressive masculinity and passive femininity. In so doing, he corrects Creon's myopic view of gender, an aspect of his equally myopic view of sovereign power.

5 Conclusion

In this essay, I advanced a necropolitical reading of *Antigone* that uses the four conceptual tools of Mbembe's necropolitics: the enmity/friendship polarity; the enemy's physical elimination; the use of space for the creation of death-worlds; and the suicide bomber as a figure of resistance to necropower. These features appear throughout the play, organizing it around the concept of necropower—its abuses and forms of resistance to it. Outside the tomb, Creon defines friendship as allegiance to the state, and enmity as its betrayal, whereas inside it, Haemon shows enmity for his father and love for his dead betrothed. Creon entombs Antigone intending for her to be eliminated by Hades, the ruler of the underworld, whom she will ritualistically marry. Space is used for the creation of mental death-worlds, where a sick Thebes hosts a king and his niece who experience themselves as poised between life and death and/or as dead. It is also used as a physical structure that seals off Antigone from the *polis*, condemning her to a tomblike 'slow death', a wearing out and deterioration of the body as the defining condition of her life.[45] Finally, Antigone is the Sophoclean equivalent of the suicide bomber, a woman in love with death for the sake of a meaning that transcends Creon's necropolitical rule. And just as she predicted on her way to the tomb, her death will inflict

44 Rehm 1994:65. For the association of cheeks with erotic desire see 783–784.
45 Berlant 2007.

on Creon a suffering no worse than the injustice he meted out to her (927–928).[46]

Yet the suicide bomber is not the only figure of resistance to necropower in the play, and in this respect, Antigone enhances Mbembe's discussion of necropolitical subversion. Inside the tomb's death-world, Antigone and Haemon become agents of death by assuming Creon's necropower and turning it against the power which made that assumption possible. Theirs is a power that remains "ambivalently tied to the conditions of subordination" since it is neither "a resistance that is really a recuperation of power" nor "a recuperation that is really a resistance. It is both at once, and this ambivalence forms the bind of agency."[47] No one commits suicide, the psychoanalyst Karl Menninger famously wrote, unless they experience at once "the wish to die, the wish to kill, the wish to be killed."[48] In *Antigone*, this triplet of volition is both the result of Creon's necropower over Antigone and Haemon and their only available form of resistance to it—their agential freedom. Antigone's agency lies in choosing the mode of her physical elimination, thereby reclaiming the second conceptual tool of (Creon's) necropower and becoming in the process a 'willful subject'.[49] Haemon's agency is more sweeping, quite appropriately given his important political position as the king's son. He appropriates his father's enmity/friendship polarity but changes its referents; attempts to eliminate his enemy/father; transforms Antigone's tomb from spatialized necropower into a marital chamber of two suicides; and is a suicide bomber who sacrifices a valueless life without his betrothed for the sake of a limitless love for a woman he has made his wife against all odds. His suicide accomplishes what the end of his life failed to do. Like an avenging Fury, it brings about his father's psychological death, thereby effectuating Antigone's curse and making Creon a man who longs to die. As Jacqueline Rose writes, "suicide bombing is an act of passionate identification—you take the enemy with you in a deadly embrace."[50]

Reading *Antigone* through a necropolitical lens transforms Mbembe's theory of subjugation into one of emancipation of political subjects, at least in fiction. Far from becoming or remaining the 'living dead', Haemon and Antigone ultimately exercise agency by choosing deaths that ennoble their lives before materially erasing them.

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46 Note, by contrast, that Creon blames no other than himself for his miserable lot at the end of the play: "And the guilt is all mine—can never be fixed on another man" (1317–1318).

47 Butler 1997:13.

48 Menninger 1933:381.

49 Ahmed 2014.

50 Rose 2004.

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CHAPTER 6

The Non-burial at Thebes: Attic Tragedy and the Athenian Necropolitical Micro-apparatus

Alexandros Velaoras

1 Introduction

The burial crisis and its resolution is a topic in literature going as far back as the *Iliad*.[1] Dramatized in the 5th century by the 'big three',[2] it persisted in the 4th century, as is attested not only by the reworking of the final scenes of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (467 BCE) and Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (411–409 BCE)[3] but also by the composition by Astydamas the Younger of an *Antigone*, which won him the victory in the Dionysia of 341 BCE (along with the other two plays forming the trilogy).[4] This persistence may be due to the strong impact of Sophocles' 'canonical' *Antigone*.[5] It may equally, however, be due to a continuing preoccupation with the issue of what Banu Bargu aptly terms "necropolitical violence,"[6] as, for example, in Moschion's *Men of Pherae* (post 358 BCE). That was a tragedy most probably dealing with the assassination of the Thessalian tyrant Alexander in 359 or 358 BCE by his wife and her three brothers and, according to the version passed on by Theopompus (FGrH 115 F 352), his *katapontismos*, that is, the throwing of his dead body into the sea.[7]

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1 Carter 2019:287; Bosnakis 2020:34 and 193. Also Bion of Borysthenes F 70 Kindstrand: Ἀλλ' ἡ περὶ ταφῆς ἀγωνία, φησὶν ὁ Βίων, πολλὰς τραγῳδίας ἐποίησεν 'The anxiety over burial, says Bion, composed many tragedies' (my translation). On the treatment (burial/non-burial) of the corpses of fallen warriors in the *Iliad*, see Kucewicz in this volume. The present chapter builds on research done for my doctoral dissertation, *The Arrival of the Suppliant in Euripides' 'Political Plays'* (University of Patras, forthcoming). I am grateful to my co-editors for their instructive comments.

2 By Aeschylus in *Eleusinians* (475 BCE?); by Sophocles in *Ajax* (440s BCE) and *Antigone* (442 or 438 BCE); by Euripides in *Suppliant Women* (ca. 421 BCE) and his own *Antigone* (420–406 BCE).

3 See n. 24 below.

4 TrGF I, 60 T 5; Xanthakis-Karamanos 1980:48–53; Zimmermann 1993:217–222; Liapis and Stephanopoulos 2019:36.

5 Griffith 1999:7.

6 Bargu 2016 = Bargu 2019a (esp. pp. 212–213). See "Theoretical Considerations" below.

7 TrGF I, 97 F 3 is the only fragment certainly belonging to *Men of Pherae*, but F 6 and 7 may have

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_007

As I will explain in this chapter, these acts of 'necropolitical violence' and the accompanying discourses are reflections on the stage of real-life practices with which the Athenian audience was familiar. Based on three tragedies of the 'Theban cycle', namely Sophocles' *Antigone* and selected extracts from Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, I will situate these acts within what I call 'the Athenian necropolitical micro-apparatus'. I am suggesting that in Classical Athens there was what Michel Foucault would call an 'apparatus (*dispositif* in French) of death', which regulated death and the treatment of the dead and comprised an entire array of at first glance unrelated elements. An integral part of that apparatus was the 'necropolitical micro-apparatus', a distinct set of discourses and practices through which the sovereign (in this case, the Athenian *dēmos*, that is the citizens of Athens) exercised their right to 'take life or let live' (even on a massive scale) according to the pre-modern conception of sovereign power[8] or displayed their power over the dead by maltreating their bodies.[9]

Adducing additional examples from historiography and oratory, I will suggest that many institutions of the *polis* 'city-state' were necropolitical in nature and/or in their objectives. I will describe the Athenian necropolitical micro-apparatus and I will attempt to explain its rationale and function in the context of the democratic city. Rather than offer an exhaustive description or inventory of its elements, however, I will explore the aim of this micro-apparatus in the context of Classical Athens and the benefits drawn from its representation on the tragic stage. But first, a brief excursus pertaining to theoretical issues is in order.

2 Theoretical Considerations

A Foucauldian 'apparatus'[10] is the system or network of variable relations established between a heterogeneous set of discursive and non-discursive elements with a dominant strategic function at a given historical moment.[11] It consists of

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the same provenance as well; see Kotlińska-Toma 2015:131–139 and 142–143; Carter 2019: 286–290 (on burial in F 6).

8 Foucault 1998:136.

9 Bargu 2019a.

10 In non-technical French usage, the word *dispositif* means "machine, device; plan, measure" (*Harrap's French and English College Dictionary* 2006, s.v. '*dispositif*' 1 and 2).

11 See Foucault 1980 (esp. pp. 194–198). Foucault offers an extensive description and discussion of an apparatus, that of sexuality, in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, published in French in 1976 and first translated in English in 1978 by Robert Hurley, who

"the various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures, which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body."[12] The elements making up a Foucauldian apparatus can be as varied as "institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions," to state but the few examples provided by Foucault himself.[13] The same elements can be part of more than one apparatus. "Further expanding the already large class of Foucauldian apparatuses, [Giorgio Agamben] call[s] an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings."[14]

I am calling the micro-apparatus I shall describe and discuss below 'necropolitical'. Necropolitics became a particularly influential concept in social and political sciences after Achille Mbembe's seminal article (2003), where it is defined as "the subjugation of life to the power of death." This subjugation results, among other things, in the creation of *death-worlds* populated by human beings reduced to the status of *living dead*.[15] In 2016, Bargu revisited the concept and extended its scope to include those acts which targeted the dead body by way of its maltreatment, the destruction of sites of burial and commemoration of the dead, and the interference with funerary rituals. Bargu termed the entire ensemble of these acts, which, she argues, "target the dead as a surrogate for, and means of, targeting the living," "necropolitical violence."[16] In this chapter, I approach the selected sources through the writings of both theorists and I also take into consideration Giorgio Agamben's influential *Homo sacer* (1995), which explores the politicization of life and death through the *homo sacer*, the figure of archaic Roman law.[17]

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renders *dispositif* as 'deployment' (pp. 75–131). The term *dispositif* as used by Foucault is admittedly a difficult word to translate in English; see Armstrong 1992:159n. On the *dispositif*, see also Bussolini 2010 (esp. pp. 88–95) and Crano 2022 (esp. pp. 2691 and 2694–2698).

12 O'Farrell 2005:129.

13 Foucault 1980:194.

14 Agamben 2009:14.

15 Mbembe 2003.

16 Bargu 2019a:213.

17 Mbembe 2003 (quotation from p. 39); Bargu 2019a; Agamben 1998. For a brief survey of necropolitics and its history, see Chapter 1, pp. 3–8.

3 The Athenian Necropolitical Micro-apparatus

The Athenian apparatus of death as I perceive it was made up of such elements as (in random order) the law(s), the decisions of the *ekklēsia* 'assembly', public decrees, the steles erected in public spaces on which they were inscribed, the penal system of the city, deviant burial practices and rituals, the location and layout of urban cemeteries[18] and other 'burial' sites, representations of death in visual art,[19] the state burial ceremony, the funeral oration, medical and philosophical discourses on death, the civic benevolence shown to the families of the war dead[20]—even tragedy as a genre (the list is not exhaustive). The ultimate purpose of this apparatus, which targeted both the living and the dead, was to safeguard the democratic regime; serve and reproduce the ideology of the *polis* 'city-state'—even in its hegemonic expression—by constructing the appropriate type of citizen; and, in the end, define who belonged within the *polis* 'community of citizens' and who did not. The necropolitical micro-apparatus included those elements in particular which were connected either with the sovereign's right and power over life and death (his power to 'make die') or with his power over the dead, especially when it came to maltreating them.

3.1 *On the Tragic Stage*

The playwrights of the tragedies on which I base my discussion below turn the spotlight on this apparatus of death and its necropolitical component and problematize the politicization of death and the overall Athenian death politics. In all of them, especially in *Antigone*, it is the prohibition of Polyneices' burial by Creon—and, of course, Antigone's disobedience—that stands out. However, as I will explain below, this is only one parameter of the sovereign's decision.

Sophocles' *Antigone* opens with the clandestine meeting of Antigone and Ismene in front of the gates of the courtyard (18), during which Antigone tells her sister that Creon has a different post-mortem treatment in store for each of their two dead brothers (21–22). In Creon's words:

> Ἐτεοκλέα μέν, ὃς πόλεως ὑπερμαχῶν
> ὄλωλε τῆσδε, πάντ' ἀριστεύσας δορί,

18 See Arrington 2010 and Shea 2021.

19 See Arrington 2015:125–176.

20 Most importantly, the adoption of war orphans by the city (Demosthenes 60.32; Hyperides 6.43; Lysias 2.75; Plato *Menexenus* 248e–249b), on which see Cudjoe 2010:213–218.

τάφῳ τε κρύψαι καὶ τὰ πάντ᾽ ἐφαγνίσαι
ἃ τοῖς ἀρίστοις ἔρχεται κάτω νεκροῖς·
τὸν δ᾽ αὖ ξύναιμον τοῦδε, Πολυνείκη λέγω,
ὃς γῆν πατρῴαν καὶ θεοὺς τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς
φυγὰς κατελθὼν ἠθέλησε μὲν πυρὶ
πρῆσαι κατ᾽ ἄκρας, ἠθέλησε δ᾽ αἵματος
κοινοῦ πάσασθαι, τοὺς δὲ δουλώσας ἄγειν,
τοῦτον πόλει τῇδ᾽ ἐκκεκήρυκται τάφῳ
μήτε κτερίζειν μήτε κωκῦσαί τινα,
ἐᾶν δ᾽ ἄθαπτον καὶ πρὸς οἰωνῶν δέμας
καὶ πρὸς κυνῶν ἐδεστὸν αἰκισθέν τ᾽ ἰδεῖν.

> Eteocles, who died fighting for this city, having excelled in battle, we shall hide in the tomb and we shall render to him all the rites that come to the noblest of the dead below. But his brother, I mean Polynices, who came back from exile meaning to burn to the ground his native city and the gods of his race, and meaning to drink the people's blood and to enslave its people—him, it is proclaimed to this city, none shall bury or lament, but they shall leave his body unburied for birds and dogs to devour and savage.
>
> SOPHOCLES *Antigone* 194–206[21]

Creon explicitly accuses Polyneices of being a traitor who returned from exile with the intention to burn down "his native city" (γῆν πατρῴαν, 199) and kill or enslave his fellow-Thebans (201–202)—the ferocity of Polyneices' attack had been vividly described by the chorus earlier, in the first choral song (*parodos*) of the play as well (100–161, especially lines 110–126). For that reason, Creon orders that Polyneices should not be "honoured with funerary gifts" (the proper meaning of κτερίζειν)[22] nor lamented (κωκῦσαι); that he should be left unburied (ἄθαπτον).[23]

Creon's edict in *Antigone* is similar in content and wording to the decrees in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and Euripides' *Phoenician Women*. Although the *Exodoi* of these plays are now considered spurious, fourth- or even third-

21 Unless otherwise stated, I quote from Lloyd-Jones's 1994 translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Sommerstein's 2008 translation of *Seven against Thebes*, and Kovacs's 2002 translation of *Phoenician Women*.

22 Cf. 1071: ἀκτέριστον 'deprived of burial rites'.

23 Cf. Sophocles *Antigone* 26–30.

century interpolations based (directly or indirectly) on *Antigone*,[24] I am quoting the relevant lines below for ease of reference and comparison. In Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, after the mutual slaughter of the two brothers the herald announces the decision of the citizen assembly (προβούλοις, 1006):

Ἐτεοκλέα μὲν τόνδ᾽ ἐπ᾽ εὐνοίᾳ χθονὸς
θάπτειν ἔδοξε γῆς φίλαις κατασκαφαῖς·
στέγων γὰρ ἐχθροὺς θάνατον εἵλετ᾽ ἐν πύλαις,
ἱερῶν πατρῴων δ᾽ ὅσιος ὢν μομφῆς ἄτερ
τέθνηκεν οὗπερ τοῖς νέοις θνῄσκειν καλόν.
οὕτω μὲν ἀμφὶ τοῦδ᾽ ἐπέσταλται λέγειν·
τούτου δ᾽ ἀδελφὸν τόνδε Πολυνείκους νεκρὸν
ἔξω βαλεῖν ἄθαπτον, ἁρπαγὴν κυσίν,
ὡς ὄντ᾽ ἀναστατῆρα Καδμείων χθονὸς
εἰ μὴ θεῶν τις ἐμποδὼν ἔστη δορὶ
τῶι τοῦδ᾽· ἄγος δὲ καὶ θανὼν κεκτήσεται
θεῶν πατρώιων, οὓς ἀτιμάσας ὅδε
στράτευμ᾽ ἐπακτὸν ἐμβαλὼν ἥιρει πόλιν.
οὕτω πετηνῶν τόνδ᾽ ὑπ᾽ οἰωνῶν δοκεῖ
ταφέντ᾽ ἀτίμως τοὐπιτίμιον λαβεῖν,
καὶ μήθ᾽ ὁμαρτεῖν τυμβοχόα χειρώματα
μήτ᾽ ὀξυμόλποις προσσέβειν οἰμώγμασιν,
ἄτιμον εἶναι δ᾽ ἐκφορᾶς φίλων ὕπο.

It has been resolved that Eteocles here, on account of his loyalty to his country, shall be buried in the loving recesses of the earth; for he found death while keeping out the enemy at the gates, and in pious defence of

24 The final scene of *Seven against Thebes* (lines 1005–1078) is considered by Hutchinson a fourth- or early-third-century interpolation, based on the final scene of Euripides' popular *Phoenician Women* and added to render Aeschylus' play "more acceptable to contemporary taste" (Hutchinson 1985:xliii and 209–211 on lines 1005–1078). Sommerstein also doubts its authenticity and thinks it was influenced by Sophocles' *Antigone* (Sommerstein 2008:147–149 with n. 17 for further bibliographical references). Diggle 1994 considers the entire *Exodos* of *Phoenician Women* (lines 1582–1766), to which the lines quoted below belong, spurious and Kovacs 2003:71 thinks that "there are good reasons for his suspicions." In his own edition of the play for the Loeb Classical Library, Kovacs brackets the passage but admits that part of the text may be genuinely by Euripides (2002:373n55). Mastronarde defends the content of the scene while agreeing that the text has been deliberately altered in places; see Mastronarde 1994:39–49 (on the problem of interpolation); 591–594 (on the authenticity of the *Exodos*) and his comments on these lines.

> the temples of his fathers he has died blamelessly where it is honourable for the young to die. That is what I have been instructed to say about him; but his brother, the dead Polyneices here, is to be cast out unburied, a prey for the dogs, as one who would have been the destroyer of the land of Cadmus, had not some god stood up to hinder his armed attack. Even in death he shall bear the pollution and curse of his ancestral gods, whom he insulted when he tried to capture the city, bringing a foreign army to attack it. So it is decided that he should get his due reward by receiving a dishonourable funeral from the flying birds; that he should neither lie under a laboriously raised burial-mound nor be dignified with high-pitched musical wailings; and that he should not have the honour of a funeral procession from his family.
>
> AESCHYLUS *Seven against Thebes* 1007–1024

Eteocles, who died a beautiful death in defence of Thebes, will be buried "with honor and pomp" (1008).[25] Polyneices, on the other hand, who betrayed his native city, will be cast out unburied and unmourned.

In *Phoenician Women*, after the end of the battle between the armies of the Argives and the Thebans and the fatal duel between Polyneices and Eteocles, Creon assumes the rulership of Thebes and proclaims the following order:

> νεκρῶν δὲ τῶνδε τὸν μὲν ἐς δόμους χρεὼν
> ἤδη κομίζειν, τόνδε δ', ὃς πέρσων πόλιν
> πατρίδα σὺν ἄλλοις ἦλθε, Πολυνείκους νέκυν
> ἐκβάλετ' ἄθαπτον τῆσδ' ὅρων ἔξω χθονός.
> κηρύξεται δὲ πᾶσι Καδμείοις τάδε·
> ὃς ἂν νεκρὸν τόνδ' ἢ καταστέφων ἁλῶι
> ἢ γῆι καλύπτων, θάνατον ἀνταλλάξεται·
> ἐᾶν δ' ἄκλαυτον, ἄταφον, οἰωνοῖς βοράν.
>
> As for these dead men, we must take one of them into the palace, but this one, the corpse of Polynices, who came with allies to sack his native city—cast him unburied beyond the country's boundaries. This proclamation will be made to all the citizens of Cadmus: whoever is caught garlanding this corpse or covering it with earth will receive death as his reward: leave him unwept, unburied, as food for birds.
>
> EURIPIDES *Phoenician Women* 1627–1634

25 Trans. Hecht and Bacon 1973. Albeit not a word-for-word translation of the Greek original, I am quoting their translation because it better renders the spirit of the decision.

In this play too, Creon considers Polyneices a traitor because he "came with allies to sack his native city" (1628–1629). "Though no enemy ['by birth', explains Mastronarde],[26] he became his city's enemy" (1652) and for that reason, he will be punished posthumously "in the manner of his burial" (τῶι τάφωι, 1654), that is by being left unburied (ἄταφον), food for the birds (οἰωνοῖς βοράν) and unwept (ἄκλαυτον).[27]

The differential treatment of the two brothers is the core element in all three versions of the sovereign's edict. It turns out that on the tragic stage, as in real life, not all dead were considered equal and that they did not, for that reason, all deserve the same post-mortem treatment. Those who had died in battle, fighting in defence of their city, were buried with all funeral honours, like Eteocles (*Antigone* 194–197; cf. also προτίσας 'honoured', 22; ἔντιμον 'honoured', 25). Those who had betrayed it, on the other hand, were denied burial altogether, like Polyneices.[28] In fact, Polyneices was so emphatically accused of treason that, when his clandestine burial by his sister was discovered and reported to Creon in *Antigone* (245–277), the guards "swept away all the dust that covered the corpse [and] carefully stripped the mouldering body" (πᾶσαν κόνιν σήραντες ἢ κατεῖχε τὸν / νέκυν, μυδῶν τε σῶμα γυμνώσαντες εὖ, 409–410), thus 'undoing' his burial and renewing the dishonour.[29]

Moreover, in all three versions of the edict, besides burial the traitor is denied lamentation as well (*Antigone* 28–29, 204; *Seven against Thebes* 1023; *Phoenician Women* 1634). Not being mourned is not less important than not being buried. "[L]amentation and burial," Margaret Alexiou explains, "were two inseparable aspects of the same thing, the γέρας θανόντων (privilege of the dead)."[30] Electra in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* is outraged by the fact that her father was buried "without mourning and without lamentation" (ἄνευ δὲ πενθημάτων … ἀνοίμωκτον, 432–433).[31] The Argive suppliant mothers in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* deplore the fact that, because of Creon's prohibition (18–19, 122), they are unable to bury and properly lament their dead children. It is as if they have been dispossessed of their sons' death. For that reason, they have gone from Argos to Eleusis in order to ask Theseus to intervene with Thebes on their behalf and persuade Creon, either with diplomatic or with military means, to

26 Mastronarde 1994:613 on line 1652.

27 On the friend/enemy polarity as a basic feature of necropolitics in *Antigone*, see also Giannopoulou in this volume pp. 90–91.

28 Cf. also Sophocles' *Ajax*.

29 Griffith 1999:196 on lines 423–428.

30 Alexiou 2002:4.

31 Trans. Sommerstein 2008.

allow the *anairesis* 'recovery' of the dead, a typical procedure in Archaic and Classical warfare.

In *Seven against Thebes* and *Phoenician Women*, it is further specified that Polyneices' dead body should be cast out of Thebes (ἔξω βαλεῖν, 1014 and ἐκβάλετ', 1630 respectively).[32] The fact that no such order is given in *Antigone* and that, instead, Polyneices' corpse is to be left unburied on the battlefield, to be eaten by birds and dogs (205–206), is considered a deviation from real-life standard practice and, therefore, one of Creon's 'errors'.[33]

Finally, the edict also provided for the severe punishment of anyone who might be caught disobeying. Antigone knows that for anyone who dares bury and lament Polyneices "death in the city is ordained, by stoning at the people's hand" (φόνον προκεῖσθαι δημόλευστον ἐν πόλει, *Antigone* 35–36). Public stoning may be implied, albeit not stated explicitly (as in lines 196–199), in *Seven against Thebes* as well. When the herald has announced the decision of the citizen assembly of Thebes, Antigone declares her intention to bury Polyneices, displaying in that way her disobedience to the city (1028–1030, 1043). The herald then warns her that "a people that has escaped danger can be brutal" (τραχύς γε μέντοι δῆμος ἐκφυγὼν κακά, 1044). Stoning was primarily a form of popular justice, even if it was occasionally incorporated in formal law. It was spontaneous, often triggered by acts which betrayed the communal interest, and it usually took the form of a public spectacle. Participation in public stoning was collective, which increased the cohesion of the community as they punished the threatening Other. It thus constituted a communal act of self-definition.[34] Antigone in *Seven against Thebes* is a threatening Other, and a woman at that.[35] She publicly announces her intention to bury Polyneices in defiance of the citizen assembly's decision (1026–1041, 1045), which leads to a visually imposing scene: after line 1054, when the herald has left the stage, until the end of the play, the chorus splits in two semichoruses, one grouped around Antigone and Polyneices' body, the other grouped around Ismene and Eteocles' body; the former participating in Antigone's disobedience, the latter abiding by the city's decisions. Such splitting of the chorus is suggestive of the civil strife which Antigone is capable of causing with her decision. But

32 In *Phoenician Women* that is precisely what Eteocles had asked (775–776). Lines 774–778 are cogently athetized, however; see Mastronarde 1994:368–370 on lines 774–777 and Kovacs 2003:69.

33 Sourvinou-Inwood 1989:147; cf. also Bowra 1944:70.

34 Forsdyke 2012:157–166. On execution by stoning in Classical Athens, see Rosivach 1987 and Syrkou 2020:66–67.

35 On Antigone as a "threatening woman-in-charge figure," see Karakantza 2023:17–20.

"civil strife among people of the same heritage and race," in Herodotus' words, "compares as disastrously to a united war effort as does war itself to peace" (στάσις γὰρ ἔμφυλος πολέμου ὁμοφρονέοντος τοσούτῳ κάκιον ἐστὶ ὅσῳ πόλεμος εἰρήνης, 8.3).[36] "A people that has escaped danger" will try to prevent such a situation even if that means physically eliminating the threat.[37] In *Phoenician Women* Antigone is explicitly warned that, if she buries her brother despite the city forbidding it, she will be put to death as a punishment (*Phoenician Women* 1657–1658). And when, in *Antigone*, Polyneices' burial is discovered and reported to Creon, Creon threatens to hang the guards and make an example of them if they do not find the culprit because he thinks that they have been bribed to bury him by a rebellious faction (*Antigone* 289–312).[38] Thus, complicity in the burial of the traitor is equated with treason and punished with a humiliating death.

3.2 *Off Stage*

We can assume with some confidence that the different treatment of Oedipus' dead sons did not take the original audiences by surprise. Indeed, in exceptional cases, Athenian legislation since the 5th century at least regulated the treatment of the dead.[39] For instance, in the case of war dead, it provided for an honorific state burial, like the one described by Thucydides in Book 2 of his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (2.34).[40] Whenever it was considered that a dead person should be not only punished but also humiliated for having betrayed his native land, on the other hand, the law prohibited burial altogether. In both cases, which significantly lay at opposing ends of the spectrum,[41] the treatment of the dead was a political decision taken by the totality of citizens, who held sovereign power[42] and had legislated accordingly. Consequently, shocking

36 Trans. Holland 2013.

37 That may also explain the joy expressed by the Chorus in the first choral song of *Antigone* and their incitement to forget (148–154).

38 Athenian citizens were protected against such treatment by the decree passed during Scamandrius' archonship (Hunter 1994:154–184; Herman 2006:299).

39 Solonian legislation had also regulated, since the 6th century, private funerary practices by imposing restrictions on the sectors of human activity connected with the conspicuous aspects of death (Patterson 2006:23–24).

40 See Pritchard 2024.

41 Sourvinou-Inwood 1989:137 calls the disposal of the traitor's body "the mirror-image of the public funerals of the war heroes." See also n. 65 below.

42 Aristotle *Politics* 1278b12 (κύριος ὁ δῆμος 'the people are supreme', trans. Rackham 1932) and 1317b28–29 (τὸ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κυρίαν εἶναι πάντων 'the assembly to be sovereign over all matters', trans. Rackham 1932). Hansen 1991:150; Herman 2006:216–221; Sakellariou 2012:328; Monson and Atack 2021.

though the specific provisions for Polyneices' body may be, they "would not be completely alien to Athenian sensibilities."[43]

Fifth-century Athenians, Efimia Karakantza rightly assumes,

> had discussed similar cases in the Assembly …; they had also tried cases of high treason as members of the courts of Heliaia; and of course, they were aware of the fortunes of the condemned to death as traitors by reading the decrees erected in the agora and other public places[44]

—the Acropolis being the most conspicuous one.[45] One of those decrees concerned Archeptolemus and Antiphon, two of the Four Hundred. The text of this decree, quoted in pseudo-Plutarch's *Lives of the Ten Orators* (first half of the 3rd century CE?), is a major source of information on the treatment of traitors in Classical Athens and for that reason I am quoting it in its entirety, despite recent doubts about its authenticity:[46]

> Προδοσίας ὤφλον Ἀρχεπτόλεμος Ἱπποδάμου Ἀγρύληθεν παρών, Ἀντιφῶν Σοφίλου Ῥαμνούσιος παρών· τούτοιν ἐτιμήθη τοῖς ἕνδεκα παραδοθῆναι καὶ τὰ χρήματα δημόσια εἶναι καὶ τῆς θεοῦ τὸ ἐπιδέκατον, καὶ τὼ οἰκία κατασκάψαι αὐτῶν καὶ ὅρους θεῖναι τοῖν οἰκοπέδοιν, ἐπιγράψαντας "Ἀρχεπτολέμου καὶ Ἀντιφῶντος τοῖν προδόντοιν [v.l. προδόταιν]." τὼ δὲ δημάρχω ἀποφῆναι τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῖν καὶ μὴ ἐξεῖναι θάψαι Ἀρχεπτόλεμον καὶ Ἀντιφῶντα Ἀθήνησι, μηδ' ὅσης Ἀθηναῖοι κρατοῦσι· καὶ ἄτιμον εἶναι Ἀρχεπτόλεμον καὶ Ἀντιφῶντα καὶ γένος τὸ ἐκ τούτοιν, καὶ νόθους καὶ γνησίους· καὶ ἐάν τις ποιήσηταί τινα τῶν ἐξ Ἀρχεπτολέμου καὶ Ἀντιφῶντος, ἄτιμος ἔστω ὁ ποιησάμενος. ταῦτα δὲ γράψαι ἐν στήλῃ χαλκῇ· καὶ ἧπερ ἀνάκειται τὰ ψηφίσματα τὰ περὶ Φρυνίχου, καὶ τοῦτο θέσθαι.

> Archeptolemus, son of Hippodamus, of Agryle, who was present in the court, and Antiphon, son of Sophilus, of Rhamnus, who was present in the court, were found guilty of treason, and sentenced as follows: they are to be handed over to the Eleven; their property is to be confiscated

43 Griffith 1999:127 on lines 26–36.

44 Karakantza 2022:209.

45 Demosthenes 19.272; Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1400a32–36; scholion to Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 273. Meyer 2013; Lambert 2017.

46 Roisman and Worthington 2015:100. Harris 2021, especially pp. 472–474; Harris and Esu 2021:83. Cf. Roisman and Worthington 2015:23: "Except for some editorial changes and omissions, the inscriptions appear authentic."

> by the state, with the customary tithe to the goddess; and their houses be demolished and markers set up on the plots bearing the following inscription: "The property of Archeptolemus and Antiphon, traitors." Their two demarchs are to draw up the inventory of their property. Neither Archeptolemus nor Antiphon is to be buried in Athens or in territory under Athenian dominion. Both Archeptolemus and Antiphon, and all their descendants, both legitimate and illegitimate, are to be deprived of their citizen rights. Anyone who adopts any descendant of Archeptolemus or Antiphon shall be deprived of his citizen rights. This sentence is to be inscribed on a bronze stele, to be set up next to the decrees relating to Phrynichus.[47]
>
> [PLUTARCH] *Lives of the Ten Orators* 834a–b8 (trans. WATERFIELD)

Archeptolemus and Antiphon were charged with treason on the embassy sent by the Four Hundred to Sparta in 411 BCE.[48] In Classical Athens, three kinds of penalties could be imposed on citizens who harmed the state or committed crimes and misdemeanours: physical, dishonourable, and monetary. Physical penalties included the death penalty, exile, and imprisonment; dishonourable penalties included non-burial (ἀταφία), the inscription of the punished citizen's name on a bronze stele, and disenfranchisement (ἀτιμία); monetary penalties included the total or partial confiscation of property, various fines,

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47 The verdict for Phrynichus was similar. Its content was preserved in a scholion to Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 313 (Carawan 2007):

> Δίδυμος καὶ Κρατερός φασι ταῦτα αἰνίττεσθαι εἰς Φρύνιχον τὸν Στρατωνίδου. ἐκακοηθεύσατο γὰρ πρὸς τὸν δῆμον ἐν Σάμωι στρατηγῶν, ὥστε ἐψηφίσατο κατ᾽ αὐτοῦ ὁ δῆμος δημόσια εἶναι τὰ Φρυνίχου χρήματα καὶ τῆς θεοῦ τὸ δέκατον μέρος, καὶ τὴν οἰκίαν κατεσκάφθαι αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ κατ᾽ αὐτοῦ ἔγραψεν ἐν στήληι χαλκῆι.
>
> Didymus and Craterus claim that these allude to Phrynichus, son of Stratonides, for he had acted maliciously against the people when he was the *stratēgos* at Samos. So, the people decided that Phrynichus' property shall be confiscated by the city and one tenth shall be given to goddess Athena and his house shall be razed to the ground. And much more against him was inscribed on a bronze stele (my translation).

See Ostwald 1988:307. However, Henderson 1987:106 on *Lysistrata* 313 thinks that the scholiast is wrong to see a reference to Phrynichus here. On bronze inscriptions in Attica, see Stroud 1963:138n1. Cf. also the case of Arthmius, frequently referred to by fourth-century orators to remind Athenians of the city's commitment in the past to severely punish traitors (Plutarch *Life of Themistocles* 6.4–5; Demosthenes 9.41–42 and 19.271–272; Dinarchus 2.24–25; and Aeschines 3.258–259). See Meiggs 1972:508–512; MacDowell 2000:319–320 on Demosthenes 19.271; and Monaco 2009:281–285.

48 On which see, for example, Thucydides 8.90.2–91.1; Andrewes 1992:479; Kagan 2003:394 and 401.

and the compensation of victims.[49] Antiphon and Archeptolemus were sentenced to death and handed over to the Eleven, who were responsible for the execution of the punishment.[50] Their punishment did not end with their execution, however; their life was not the ultimate object of political and juridical power. The sentence imposed on them consisted in a combination of penalties which also targeted their dead bodies, their property, their reputation, and their family—"to increase the amount of punishment inflicted on the capital offender[s]," Danielle Allen claims.[51]

The decree quoted above is also worthy of remark because it clearly displays the variety of necropolitical practices available in Classical Athens. Athenian law offered the sovereign *dēmos* 'citizenry' the option to 'take life', especially when threatened, in accordance with the pre-modern notion of biopower.[52] Although there is no definitive list of capital offences, we know that the death penalty was imposed in cases of high treason, temple robbery, murder, and a series of *kakourgēmata* 'malefactions'.[53] We also know that executions were performed with one of the following methods: precipitation into a pit (the *barathron*), death on the plank (*apotympanismos*), or hemlock.[54] Archeptolemus and Antiphon must have been executed by being thrown into the *barathron*, a mode of execution used until the end of the 5th century for political criminals.[55]

Such is the explicit provision of the decree of Cannonus:

> ἴστε δέ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πάντες ὅτι τὸ Καννωνοῦ ψήφισμά ἐστιν ἰσχυρότατον, ὃ κελεύει, ἐάν τις τὸν τῶν Ἀθηναίων δῆμον ἀδικῇ, δεδεμένον ἀποδικεῖν ἐν τῷ δήμῳ, καὶ ἐὰν καταγνωσθῇ ἀδικεῖν, ἀποθανεῖν εἰς τὸ βάραθρον ἐμβληθέντα [v.l. ἀποθανόντα … ἐμβληθῆναι], τὰ δὲ χρήματα αὐτοῦ δημευθῆναι καὶ τῆς θεοῦ τὸ ἐπιδέκατον εἶναι.

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49 Sakellariou 2012:136. See also MacDowell 1978:254–258.

50 The Eleven were a constituent element of what Gabriel Herman terms "the democracy's coercive apparatus" (2006:229–246). Although Herman does not make any reference to Foucault's *dispositif*, his use of the word *apparatus* is interesting.

51 Allen 2000:201; Herman 2006:221–229 (on Athens' legitimate violence). On the confiscation of property, see Herodotus 6.121; Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.7.20, 22; Diodorus Siculus 13.101.7; Harrison 1971:178–179. On the razing of houses, Connor 1985; Forsdyke 2012:158–163.

52 Foucault 1998:135–136; Foucault 2003:239–241. Cf. Herman 2006:221.

53 Bonner and Smith 1930:276; Kucharski 2015:13–17.

54 Bonner and Smith 1930:271–287; Gernet 1981:252–276; Velissaropoulos 1984; Todd 1993:141; Kucharski 2015; Carlà-Uhink 2021. On *apotympanismos*, see Bosnakis (pp. 149–152) and Syrkou (pp. 196–198) in this volume.

55 Roisman and Worthington 2015:100; Syrkou 2020:64–65.

> You all know, men of Athens, the extremely severe terms of the decree of Cannonus. It provides that if anyone does harm to the people of Athens, he shall make his defence in chains before the Assembly, and if he is found guilty, he shall be put to death by being thrown into the pit, his property shall be confiscated, and a tenth part of it shall belong to the goddess.
>
> XENOPHON *Hellenica* 1.7.20 (trans. WARNER 1966)

The decree, which cannot be dated with certainty, is brought up in Xenophon on the occasion of the aftermath of the battle of Arginusae (406 BCE). After the triumph of the Athenian navy, the captains of the victorious triremes delayed the collection of the survivors and the dead from the sea until it was impossible due to a severe storm.[56] According to the law of the *eisangelia* 'denunciation' (dated to the end of the 5th century), not recovering the dead from the battlefield was considered an act of treason.[57] Thus the condemnation of the generals was their punishment not only for not treating the war dead in a respectful way but also, as I see it, for permitting what resembled an act of necropolitical violence (non-burial). It was as if the law tried to limit access to necropolitical power only to the sovereign state.

Besides taking a life, Athenian law also allowed the sovereign to maltreat the dead. The variant reading ἀποθανόντα εἰς τὸ βάραθρον ἐμβληθῆναι 'he shall be put to death and then thrown into the pit' means that the traitors would first be executed and then thrown dead into the pit.[58] Although being thrown into the *barathron* was an accepted form of disposing of the dead (as a form of downward movement like proper burial),[59] at the same time, it constituted a form of non-burial (the corpse was visible[60] and unprotected against carrion birds),

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56 Kagan 2003:459–461.

57 Hyperides 4.8. See Sinclair 1988:146–152; Harris and Esu 2021:57–61.

58 Keramopoullos 1923:97–99. I consider the *barathron* to be the necropolitical counterpart of the public cemetery of Kerameikos. The former was a 'burial' site reserved for convicted criminals while the latter was the cemetery where war dead were honorifically buried by the state. On the pit, see Marchiandi 2014; Carlà-Uhink 2021:302–314. It is debated whether precipitation in the *barathron* was a method of execution (Cantarella 1991:96–105) or only used for the disposal of the corpses (MacDowell 1978:254; Todd 1993:141 and 2000:37–39; Allen 2000:218–219).

59 Bosnakis 2020:193.

60 Plato *Republic* 4.439e–440a (note the number of words related to seeing). It is more likely that Plato is here referring to an artificial cave, the *orygma*, used in the 4th century for the same purpose. This leads me to a brief excursus on what I regard as a salient feature of Athenian necropolitics and, especially, necropolitical violence: the differential distribu-

hence an act of necropolitical violence. For Archeptolemus and Antiphon it was explicitly decreed that neither should be buried in Athens or in territory under Athenian dominion (μὴ ἐξεῖναι θάψαι Ἀρχεπτόλεμον καὶ Ἀντιφῶντα Ἀθήνησι, μηδ᾽ ὅσης Ἀθηναῖοι κρατοῦσι). Here is the law prohibiting burial (recorded by Xenophon as an alternative to the decree of Cannonus on the same occasion):

> ἐάν τις ἢ τὴν πόλιν προδιδῷ ἢ τὰ ἱερὰ κλέπτῃ, κριθέντα ἐν δικαστηρίῳ, ἂν καταγνωσθῇ, μὴ ταφῆναι ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ, τὰ δὲ χρήματα αὐτοῦ δημόσια εἶναι.

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tion of visibility among the dead bodies. I hope to discuss this issue in a future publication, but I will briefly summarize my thesis below.

In general, all dead were normally buried. An ordinary private funeral included the *prothesis* 'laying out' of the dead at home, the *ekphora*, i.e. the carrying of the deceased to the cemetery, and the interment. All three stages took place within a small circle of attending relatives and friends and the funeral regulation introduced by Solon in the 6th century made sure that they attracted as little attention as possible. Those dead were unmarked, positively or negatively. That was not the case, however, with the dead whose posthumous fate was decided by the *polis*. The funerals of fallen warriors as well as the post-mortem treatment of those deemed enemies of the city (traitors, temple robbers, and aspiring tyrants) were public matters and marked ones at that. Those that the city considered her enemies became victims of necropolitical violence. In their case, their corpses were supposed to be conspicuous, a public spectacle—by being left unburied or through the way of the execution of the death sentences (e.g. by throwing the condemned into the *barathron* or through the torture of *apotympanismos*). The war dead, on the contrary, were deemed worthy of an honorific burial. Their bodies themselves, however, were practically invisible; it was the cremated remains, or "cremains" (Rees 2018), of the dead that were laid out in "coffins of cypress" (Thucydides 2.34). As a result, those who attended the funeral had no contact, visual or otherwise, with the dead (cf. Euripides *Suppliant Women* 941–949). In Pericles' funeral oration for those fallen in the Samian war (440 BCE), the dead are even likened to the gods on the basis of their invisibility:

> "the gods themselves," he said, "we cannot see (ὁρῶμεν), but from the honours which they receive, and the blessings which they bestow, we conclude (τεκμαιρόμεθα) that they are immortal." So it was, he said, with those who had given their lives for their country.
>
> PLUTARCH *Life of Pericles* 8.9 (trans. PERRIN 1916)

Bosnakis correctly concludes that the form and mode of funerary ritual was designed *for the public gaze* and reflected without doubt an ideology oriented in the wide sense to the *polis* (Bosnakis 2020:190). So, the visibility or invisibility of the corpses during the rituals was intentional and not devoid of political signification. According to Bargu, in her discussion of necropolitics in contemporary Turkey, "[t]his (en)forced visibility that displays how an insurgent body is punished thus dictates the parameters of how the proper body must be constituted by way of contrast" (Bargu 2019a:217). Cf. Butler 2011:25–32; Riess 2016:96–99. See also Weiner pp. 56–57 and Oikonomopoulou in this volume.

> those who are traitors to the state or who have stolen property sacred to the gods shall be tried before the courts and, if found guilty, shall not be buried in Attica and shall have their property confiscated.
>
> *Hellenica* 1.7.22 (trans. WARNER 1966)

The law, already in effect in 462 BCE,[61] forbade the burial of traitors and temple robbers in Attica and, since the 4th century,[62] anywhere inside the frontiers of the vast territory of the allied cities.[63] According to this law, a traitor was actually sentenced to death and non-burial. And if a man had been condemned posthumously, he would most probably be exhumed. In 411 BCE, for example, Phrynichus, one of the leaders of the Four Hundred, was assassinated and buried. Still, the people (ὁ δῆμος) voted to put his corpse on trial for treason.[64] Phrynichus was indeed found guilty, so "they dug up [his] bones and cast them out of Attica" (τὰ τοῦ προδότου ὀστᾶ ἀνορύξαντες ἐκ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἐξώρισαν).[65] It should be noted, however, that the law did not preclude burial altogether and that the regular practice was to cast the traitor's corpse outside the control area of the city. The relatives or the locals (who wished to avoid the *miasma* 'pollution') would then take care of it.[66]

Scholars have been puzzled by the fact that betrayal was combined in one law with theft of sacred property.[67] In my opinion, however, temple robbers

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61 It is impossible to date the law with precision but Thucydides (1.138.6) provides a *terminus ante quem* when he reports that Themistocles' bones were brought into Attica and buried "without the knowledge of the Athenians (κρύφα Ἀθηναίων)—burial of a man exiled for treason was illegal (ὡς ἐπὶ προδοσίᾳ φεύγοντος)" (trans. Hammond 2009).

62 See IG II^2 43; Bosnakis 2020:192.

63 Parker 1983:45n47 lists a number of 'traitors' who were denied burial in Attic soil or whose bones were dug up and expelled; cf. also Sourvinou-Inwood 1989:138n20. On *ataphia*, see Lindenlauf 2001; Helmis 2007; Bosnakis 2020:33–42. Not surprisingly, the issue of non-burial has been extensively treated in publications on Sophocles' *Antigone*; I have profitably read Cerri 1979; Rosivach 1983; Sourvinou-Inwood 1989 (see especially pp. 137–138); Griffith 1999:29–30; Harris 2006; Patterson 2006b; Osborne 2008; and Karakantza 2022.

64 Lycurgus 1.113.

65 Lycurgus 1.115 (trans. Harris 2001); Helmis 2007:264–265. Forsdyke 2012:231n108 correctly remarks that

> The hurling of bones over borders should be seen as the ritual equivalent (albeit in inverse) of the escorting of bones of mythical heroes back into the territory of the state. In the latter case, the community participates in the return of heroic bones and founds a hero-cult which symbolizes some of the positive qualities that they wish to identify with their community.

66 Bosnakis 2020:36.

67 E.g. MacDowell 1978:176. A comprehensive explanation is offered by Connor 1985:93; and Hutchinson 1985:213 on *Seven against Thebes* 1017.

could be considered enemies of the city not only for metaphysical but also for pragmatic reasons. Temples functioned as treasuries of the state and over time they accumulated considerable wealth in precious metal and war spoils.[68] In times of emergency or war, this wealth was used for the protection of the city. For that reason, in the summer of 431 BCE, to encourage the Athenian army in the face of the impending Spartan invasion, Pericles proceeds to the detailed enumeration of the financial resources of Athens (sacred and secular) kept in the Acropolis and other sanctuaries (Thucydides 2.13.3–5). The Spartan Lampito in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is also certain that the Athenians will pursue their military action while "[their] Goddess' temple has a bottomless fund of money" (τὠργύριον τὤβυσσον ᾖ πὰρ τᾷ σιᾷ, 174).[69] Depriving the *polis* 'city-state' of these material means at times of war could endanger her safety. David Pritchard remarks that Athens in the 5th century waged war "more frequently than ever before, doing so, on average, in 2 out of 3 years" and he concludes that "the fifth-century *dēmos* judged their topmost public priority to be war," not religion nor politics.[70] As a result, the money devoted to their armed forces by far exceeded that spent on politics and festivals combined.[71] For that reason, theft of public property could have been regarded as an act against the *polis* 'citizens' no less than sacrilege; and its perpetrator as an enemy of the *polis* no less than irreverent to the gods. "[T]hat such behaviour was regarded as particularly threatening" is also suggested by the fact that "this term had its own *graphē* [prosecution]."[72]

Although it is not stated in the condemnation decree of Antiphon and Archeptolemus, non-burial also precluded lamentation. In Classical Athens, public grieving, by which I mean formal lamentation by women (as opposed to the spontaneous dirge one might sing in private), was part of the funerary ritual, which culminated with the interment of the deceased.[73] In domestic

68 Giovannini 2008:168; cf. Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 421–423 and 488.

69 Trans. Henderson 2000. Lapatin 2005:279–287; Pritchard 2015:93–94. Kyrieleis 1993:105 notes that the "Parthenon with the chryselephantine statue of the goddess by Phidias was not the real cult temple of the Athenian Acropolis, but seems rather to have functioned as a 'treasury' of the Athenian state." Temples were safe places; Cleisthenes is said "to have entrusted his daughters' dowries to Juno at Samos when he was worried about his own security" (*Atheniensis Clisthenes Iunoni Samiae, civis egregius, cum rebus timeret suis, filiarum dotis credidisse*, Cicero *Laws* 2.41 [trans. Zetzel 1999]).

70 Pritchard 2019:5.

71 Pritchard 2015 (especially pp. 91–120); Pritchard 2019:143–168.

72 Todd 1993:307, who notes, however, that "it is difficult to find an uncomplicated example in our sources," perhaps an indication "that this is the sort of opportunist crime which has tended to vanish from the record" (Todd 1993:307n19).

73 Stears 2008:147.

funerals, it took place during the *prothesis* of the dead within a small circle of attendees inside the house.[74] In the public state funerals of war dead, it took place ἐπὶ τὸν τάφον 'at the place of burial' (Thucydides 2.34.4). If a dead man was deprived of burial, he was also deprived of lamentation. In Judith Butler's vein of thinking, if a life is not publicly grieved, that may be because a life is apprehended as "ungrievable." "One of the functions of laments," Gail Holst-Warhaft explains, "is to commit the dead to memory."[75] An ungrievable, and therefore ungrieved, life is, in the final analysis, one that is hardly apprehended as a life and has no place in the memory landscape of the community.[76] Although the occasions in the light of which Butler wrote the essays cited are far removed from ancient reality (the events of 9/11 in New York City and the subsequent American war waged in Afghanistan by the Bush administration), I think that her basic premise was valid in antiquity as well. Let us consider, for instance, the fallen Argives in *Suppliant Women*. By being left unburied, hence also unmourned, unlike other war dead, these soldiers would be deprived of the occasion which would inscribe them in their community's history. With no *sēma* 'tomb' to indicate the location of their grave; nor *stēlē* 'stele, gravestone' to indicate their identity, there was no sense of durability to their memory either—actually no memory at all.[77] The preservation of the deceased's memory was indeed a real concern of living relatives, as is clearly suggested, among other things, by their regular visits to the tomb, often accompanied by the singing of a dirge.[78]

At the same time, however, Allen remarks, "the city sometimes went to great lengths to *memorialize the disappearance* of the wrongdoer's body."[79] The convicted traitor's physical presence in the city was eliminated not only by his being sentenced to *ataphia* (thus by being deprived of a tomb) but often by the confiscation of his property and the razing of his house (*kataskaphē*) too. Discussing *kataskaphē*, Connor assumes that

74 Alexiou 2002:6.

75 Holst-Warhaft 1992:101; a wide range of social functions (including the construction and promotion of family history) is attributed to women's lamentations by Stears 2008:149–150.

76 Butler 2004:19–49; Butler 2016:1–32.

77 These are, according to Garcia 2013:143, the three essential functions of the hero's tomb in Homeric epic. The same functions were served by the common grave of war dead in Classical Athens, too.

78 Burkert 1985:194; Garland 1985:104–120; Hame 1999:102–117; Alexiou 2002:7–10. See also Humphreys 1980.

79 Allen 2000:217 (my emphasis); Helmis 2007:267–268.

> Responsibility was never individual. The close proximity imposed by the physical circumstances of the Greek house, the virtual absence of privacy, the close bonds within each household, meant that all members of the *oikos* ['household'] would know the acts and plans of each individual. Strong family loyalties ensured complicity or at least protection after the fact.[80]

Thus, the razing of the traitor's house aimed, practically, at the punishment of the presumably complicit *oikos* members and, symbolically, at the extinction of the traitor's entire *oikos* 'family'.[81] The reasons for his elimination were then publicized, first, on the plots where his house stood by setting up markers bearing an inscription which indicated that the convicted was a traitor; and, second, by inscribing the sentence on bronze steles to be set up on the Acropolis.[82] The publication of the punishments was an additional punishment in itself insofar as it defamed the convicted and their families.[83] The steles on which such decrees were inscribed constituted a public record of wrong individual action (treason), right joint action (punishment of traitors by the institutions of the *polis*), and an essential political principle, namely the commitment of the entire *polis* 'citizenry' to punish those who threatened its security.[84] In that way, the publication of the punishments served a deterrent function as it warned against similar acts and the steles became, according to Josiah Ober, "prominent monuments in the democratic state's 'public economy of esteem.'"[85] The erection of the steles on the Acropolis (as in the *agora*) was important for the additional reason that they stood near and interacted with monuments which memorialized acceptable behaviour: first, the steles which honoured the benefactors of the *polis*,[86] and second, the architectural sculpture on the Acropolis buildings, which depicted moments of sacrifice for Athens from the mythical

80 Connor 1985:94. Connor, however, connects the extinction of the traitor's *oikos* with the city's protection against pollution.

81 Connor 1985:79; Roisman and Worthington 2015:101–102. *Kataskaphē* was the punishment for other major offences too: murder, subversion, misconduct of military expeditions (Connor 1985:83).

82 See n. 85; Ober 2008:186–189; on the importance of the location of the inscriptions on the Acropolis (with a focus on the 4th century), see Lambert 2018:19–46. Cf. Shear 2011:69.

83 Ober 2008:188. See also Syrkou in this volume p. 203.

84 Ober 2008:188.

85 Ober 2008:187–188. Ober borrows the concept of the "economy of esteem" from Brennan and Pettit 2004.

86 See Luraghi 2010 (with reference to the Hellenistic age); Meyer 2013; and Lambert 2018:71–92.

past.[87] As a result, as Stephen Lambert remarks, "[l]iterally or metaphorically, the Acropolis loomed over Attica as a sort of physical incarnation of the moral and religious imperative to patriotic behaviour."[88]

As it was said earlier, it was not only Archeptolemus and Antiphon but also their descendants, both legitimate and illegitimate, as well as anyone who adopted any descendant of theirs, that were to be deprived of their citizen rights (ἄτιμον εἶναι, ἄτιμος ἔστω). *Atimia* as a penalty that extended to the entire family was not uncommon in Classical Athens. However, *atimia* is a complicated concept in Ancient Greek law and its exact meaning has been much debated among scholars.[89] That debate has so far been inconclusive, but one point of consensus is that *atimia* was not an unchanging concept but evolved from Archaic to Classical times. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to contribute to that debate. What is important to consider for the sake of my argument is that in the course of its evolution from pre-Solonian times to the end of the Classical period, *atimia* was both a moral and a legal concept, linked not only with loss of honour, but also with deprivation of the benefit and protection of the law (which means that the *atimos* could be killed with impunity),[90] banishment, limitation of civic status or loss of all privileges composing citizenship (e.g. participation in courts, assembly, magistracies etc.).

Hereditary *atimia* and the publication of the punishments had as a consequence the degradation and humiliation of the living relatives. The living were thus targeted through the dead, or, to be more accurate, they were punished for the dead's actions, becoming the objects of 'necropolitical violence' as defined by Bargu. Although it would be an exaggeration to claim with Mbembe that with *atimia* the *polis* 'citizens' condemned the living to a state of living dead,[91] the condition to which they were reduced could now be called 'civil death'.[92] Civil death is defined as the deprivation of a citizen's political, economic, and social rights. Unless they were banished from Athens, the *atimoi* could continue to live in the city with no visible stigma of their *atimia*. However, if they were caught trying to exercise any of the civic rights which they had been deprived of, they were liable to death by *apotympanismos*, a very public pun-

87 See Arrington 2015:125–176.

88 Lambert 2017:30.

89 See Dmitriev 2015:45–49 (for more examples of *atimia* extending to the whole family) and 35–39 (for a concise literature review). See also Karakantza in this volume pp. 73–78 for an exploration of *atimia* in Sophocles' *Ajax*.

90 Like the *homo sacer* of archaic Roman law (Agamben 1998).

91 Mbembe 2019:92.

92 Cf. Bosnakis 2020:50.

ishment, which would make their humiliation even greater. As a result, many *atimoi* preferred their self-exile.[93]

What do all these laws and practices have in common? Was there a common objective behind them? That I am going to discuss in the following section.

3.3 *What Was the Strategic Function of the Necropolitical Micro-apparatus?*

The necropolitical micro-apparatus which I broadly outlined in the previous sections was a well-established reality in fifth-century Athens, as is suggested by the 'hard' evidence adduced. However, it was equally well established in the collective imaginary of fifth-century Athenians and projected by the playwrights onto tragic Thebes, that famous (but also contested) "anti-Athens."[94] The audience witnessed the death-related practices put on stage and became the recipients of the Athenian discourses on death articulated in the plays—Attic tragedy as a genre was replete with death, dead people, and death rituals. The audience that sat in the theatre of Dionysus during the Great Dionysia was composed of Athenian citizens and their sons, metics, foreigners and, most probably, women (perhaps even a few slaves). Interestingly, this is a typical audience for a state funeral, too, as we are told by Thucydides (ἀστῶν καὶ ξένων 'of the citizens and the strangers', 2.34; γυναῖκες … αἱ προσήκουσαι 'the women who are related to the deceased', 2.34; τοκέας 'parents', 2.44; παισί … ἢ ἀδελφοῖς 'sons … or brothers', 2.45). It comprised Athenians and non-Athenians, men and a few women, younger and older people. I consider the coincidence of the audiences of state funerals and drama contests in the City Dionysia to be significant. Both Attic tragedy and the funeral oration as articulations of political discourse were distinct elements of the death apparatus and contributed, to varying degrees, not only to the "instruction of the Athenians"[95] but also to their 'construction'.

One significant difference, however, is that the funeral oration was the discourse *of* the *polis*[96] while tragedy (like comedy) articulated a discourse *about* the *polis* and could, often did, take a critical stance on various *poli*-tical issues. That is because tragedy, according to Cornelius Castoriadis, was one of democracy's correcting mechanisms. Athens, Castoriadis explains, was a self-insti-

93 Todd 1993:142; Christ 2006:123.

94 Zeitlin 1990:132.

95 A reference to Justina Gregory's 1997 monograph. On the didactic value of tragedy, see Salkever 1986; Goldhill 1997:66–67; Gregory 1997:1–17; and Croally 2005.

96 The orator who delivered the funeral speech, we are told, was selected by the *boulē* 'council' (Plato *Menexenus* 234b4–7).

tuting democratic community, which means that it created its institutions and passed its laws rather than inheriting them from, or having them imposed by, an exterior entity. As such, it also questioned them and was ready to revise them when it was thought that they were wrong.[97] This presupposed deliberation and judgement. By being placed in the mythical context of tragedy, Athenian necropolitics was problematized by the tragic poets, who invited the audience to situate themselves as critical actors in relation to it.

But why did necropolitics matter so much? It is important to remember that the necropolitical micro-apparatus was an integral part of the larger Athenian apparatus of death. The laws, public decrees, the institutions, the practices, the rhetoric, the artistic representations on public buildings and other structures—in general, all the discursive and non-discursive elements involved in the treatment of the dead or related to death at large—were part of that apparatus, which also included such elements as the honorific state burial of war dead, the funeral oration, the Kerameikos cemetery, the adoption of war orphans by the state, etc. It is necessary to consider the necropolitical micro-apparatus alongside its honorific counterpart because, as Bargu correctly underlines,

> necropolitics is always discriminating: it works by defining which lives matter … Through its operation, necropolitics divides the safe from the unsafe, the political from the criminal, the worthy from the unworthy. It therefore delineates not only what counts as political acts and public matters, but also who counts as political subjects, or the proper subjects of politics.[98]

By the same token, necropolitics also defines which deaths matter and which do not—or, as Butler puts it,[99] which lives are grievable and which are ungrievable—presupposing and performatively reproducing the aforementioned divisions post mortem.

Foucault considered an apparatus to have a dominant strategic function at a given historical moment. Most of the elements of the death apparatus appeared during the birth or the establishment of Athenian democracy (e.g. the *patrios nomos*) while others appeared during the rise of Athens to prominence among Greek *poleis* after the Persian Wars and the transformation of the Delian

97 Castoriadis 1991: 81–123; Castoriadis 2008:135–147.

98 Bargu 2019c:7.

99 Butler 2004:19–49 and Butler 2016:13–15 and 22–32 *passim*.

League into the Athenian Empire.[100] Throughout this long period, I suggest, Athenian democracy and the empire were precarious, constantly threatened with subversion. In the order of their appearance, the various elements of the Athenian apparatus of death aimed at supporting the fragile nascent democracy and protecting it from attempts at subverting it and restoring a much-dreaded tyranny or, when it was already established and especially towards the end of the 5th century, an oligarchic regime.[101] They also aimed at consolidating the developing imperial power and suppressing revolt among the allies. The cases of Samos (441/440 BCE) and Mytilene (427 BCE) with the spread of massive death are revealing instances of these later aims.

Posel and Gupta argue that "the control of corpses is always simultaneously about the social production of life."[102] The necropolitical micro-apparatus (like the death apparatus) ultimately targeted the living. It had spread through the entire social body. "We belong to social apparatuses," Gilles Deleuze remarks, "and act within them."[103] As a result, the Athenian necropolitical micro-apparatus was practically aimed at every single Athenian citizen or resident of Attica in their multiple social roles and later, since the consolidation and at the height of the Athenian Empire, it was aimed at every 'subject' of the Athenian Empire. It was able to encourage a certain kind of behaviour and it was intended to discourage another. For that reason, it allowed the sovereign *dēmos*, when threatened,[104] to decide the life or death of the citizens of Athens or the allied cities. It also helped create a category of post-mortem outsiders, which included those citizens who had been deemed and labelled dangerous for the *polis* and the constitution and who were therefore, even posthumously, expelled from the community of the Athenians and the geographic limits of Athens—symbolically and physically.

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100 The institution of each law or practice is difficult to date with precision. It is generally accepted that the state funeral in the format reported by Thucydides had been established by the late 460s BCE; the *ataphia* law had also been in effect by 462 BCE. On dating the *patrios nomos*, see Jacoby 1944; Loraux 2006 [1981]:58–61; Clairmont 1983:7–15; Arrington 2015:19–54; Kucewicz 2021:127–131 and 235n45; Wienand 2023:72–101. On the *ataphia* law, Sourvinou-Inwood 1989:138n20.

101 It is indicative that Dmitriev examines Athenian *atimia* as part of the legislation against tyranny and subversion. *Atimia*, like civil death, was ultimately a political method to suppress opponents.

102 Posel and Gupta 2009:308.

103 Deleuze 1992:164.

104 Foucault 1998:135 points out that "the power of life and death was not an absolute privilege: it was conditioned by the defence of the sovereign, and his own survival."

In her excellent article on the politics of the corpse, Reine-Marie Bérard explores how "the funerary treatment of military casualties became a crucial means of negotiating adaptable modes of affiliation to the political community from the Archaic period on" and she argues that "controlling the corpses of military casualties … became a powerful way to delimit the *poleis* [*sic*] and maintain its cohesion, not only before the enemy on the battlefield but also within the city itself at moments of high tension."[105] Outsiders (foreigners, metics, and slaves) who had taken part and fallen in an Athenian war were, after their death, treated like insiders by being granted the same funeral honours as the Athenians.

Similarly, as it is eloquently put by Bosnakis,

> The denial of burial and honours within the city's control area to the sacrilegious, traitors, aspiring tyrants, either by executing and throwing them in the gorges, or by mistreating the corpse and discarding it outside the limits of the city … determined the ultimate limit of intolerable behaviour in relation to the official political and social values of the city. The exemplary disgrace of the specific perpetrators, with the symbolic rejection of the body from the community and their negative inscription in the collective memory, aimed at the complete deconstruction of their human as well as political existence, thus sending to the networks entrusted with the creation of social knowledge a stern message of reformation and adherence to the public virtues and social structures.[106]

It turns out that in Classical Athens it was both fallen heroes and the enemies of the *polis* that served a boundary maintenance function, both groups laying bare the distinction between insider and outsider.[107]

4 Conclusion

The Athenian apparatus of death was a complex set of laws, regulations, and decrees; religious and civic rituals; official discourses; artefacts; architectural structures, etc., which, usually in a complementary way, regulated death and the treatment of the dead. In Classical Athens, not all deaths counted the same; nor were all dead considered equal. Those who had valiantly fought and fallen

105 Bérard 2020a; quotation from Bérard 2020b:1–11.

106 Bosnakis 2020:243.

107 I am here adapting a sentence from Balkan 2019:237.

for their homeland on the battlefield were considered to have died "a beautiful death"[108] and were therefore treated with full honours. Those, on the other hand, who had betrayed their homeland merited nothing more than utmost dishonour, which often extended to their families and their descendants. These traitors and their corpses were the prime objects of necropower and necropolitical violence and it was the necropolitical micro-apparatus outlined in this chapter that dealt with them. The treatment of all dead by the *polis* certainly had political motives and it targeted both the dead and the living (via the dead). All kinds of related practices and discourses were in fact inscribed within a network of reciprocity at the centre of which lay the *polis*. Around this centre lay the citizens both as individuals and as members of wider social groups, such as adult men, women, children. The reciprocal relations between the *polis* and those groups could be either positive or negative. It was the *polis*, however, that always had the last word. The *polis* was no abstract entity nor limited to a settlement; it was the community of citizens themselves.[109] Hence, it was the citizens' relationship with each other and their place in the *polis* qua community that the apparatus of death ultimately aimed to regulate. Inasmuch as the democratic *polis* and, later, the Athenian Empire, were threatened with subversion, necropolitics, 'lurking' in public spaces, unambiguously reminded passers-by of its potential.

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108 Loraux 2018.

109 On the definition of the *polis*, see Hansen 2006:56 and Karakantza 2020:11–24.

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PART 3

Dead and (Un)Buried: The Material Evidence

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CHAPTER 7

Deviations from Necro-normality in Ancient Greek *Poleis*: The Governance of the Corpse (Modalities and Symbolisms)

Dimitrios Bosnakis

> The wind tones like God's word over the grave of the nameless.
>
> STEFAN ZWEIG[1]

1 Introduction

Life against the backdrop of death acquires transparency. The burial ritual is a complex process with material and immaterial elements as well as codified rules and behaviours.[2] Faced with the practical treatment of the corpse that caused fear and solicitude as well as emotional and spiritual confusion, the Greeks were called upon to take care of its proper decomposition, facilitating the transition of the soul to the Other World. The funeral, through the established ritual performance,[3] was also meant to avoid the *miasma* 'pollution' of the participants.[4] Meanwhile, the family of the deceased felt the need to express the grief and perform the duty of commemoration, first privately and later by participating collectively in the civic festivals of the dead.[5] In exceptional cases, e.g. warriors fallen on the battlefield, the state had established a special protocol of public funeral with its own honourable symbolism.[6] On the other hand, when it came to abandoned corpses of people dying in the

1 Quotation from Zweig 1964:335.
2 Garland 1989; Osborne 2008.
3 Frisone 2011:179; Walter-Karydi 2015:103.
4 Parker 1996.
5 Johnston 1999:63–71.
6 Athens: Clairmont 1981; Stupperich 1994; Rose 2000; Arrington 2010; Arrington 2015. Also, Thasos: Frisone 2000:127–138.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_008

street (citizens, free strangers, slaves etc.), in Athens it was the responsibility of the *dēmarchos* 'demarch' to bury them and perform the necessary purifications.[7] However, there is no evidence as to whether in ancient Greek cities something like a 'potter's field' was reserved for unknown, unclaimed and indigent people.[8] The form and manner of the burial ritual expressed an ideology primarily focused on the city and conveyed to networks of social knowledge the community's final and ultimate account of the behaviour, the actions or failings of its deceased members, and sometimes insecurities due to the cause of their death. Given that the deceased enjoyed the esteem of his fellow citizens for his social role and conduct, the burial ritual ensured the lawful γέρας θανόντων 'the last honours of the dead' for every citizen. Regarding those who had committed incurable damage (temple-robbers, traitors, and aspiring tyrants), the *polis* intervened and prohibited burial.[9] The denial of burial and honours within the city's control area to public offenders either by executing and throwing them in the gorges,[10] or by mistreating the corpse and discarding it outside the *polis* borders (*hyperoria*; from the 4th century BCE it was extended beyond the frontiers of the territory of the allied cities)[11] determined the ultimate limit of intolerable behaviour in relation to the political and social values of the city.

The ban on the funeral was in fact the ultimate display of power. Deliberate destruction of the identity of the deceased, together with the obliteration of his memory from the public topography, constituted the most exemplary disgrace in society for the perpetrator. The dichotomy between decent and respectable burial and its denial, between honour and abuse, was a decisive warning for the regulation and control of social groups in Greek cities, as it imposed the governance of the corpse as a "powerful symbol" of manipulating citizens,[12] moving an otherwise private matter into the public sphere.

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7 It is known that the dead were collected from the streets by the policemen with the help of the public servants, see Demosthenes 43.57–58; [Aristotle] *Constitution of Athens* 50.2; IG II^2 1672, 119–120. Cf. also IG XII 472, B, 64–66 (Kos, 240 BCE). Patterson 2006:22–23; Osborne 2008:53–54. For the authenticity of the law, see Zelnick-Abramovitz 2015:67 no. 68.

8 Patterson 2006:23, 33; Snodgrass 2009:102; Zelnick-Abramovitz 2015:67 no. 70. For common graves in Rome, see Hopkins 1983:201–217; Hope 2000:110–112; Bodel 2000; cf. Graham 2006:63–84.

9 Rosivach 1983; Lindenlauf 2001; Shapiro 2006; Helmis 2007; Karakantza 2022. Cf. Hope 2000:116–120; Harris 2004:39; Patterson 2006:33–34. On the γέρας θανόντων, see also Kucewicz in this volume.

10 Marchiandi 2014; Allen 2000:218–221, 324–325. On the denial of burial, cf. Velaoras (Chapter 6) in this volume.

11 IG II^2 43, 61–63 (Decree of Aristoteles, 378/7 BCE). Rosivach 1983:208 no. 49. Also, in Eretria, Knoepfler 2001:225–226 (l. 10–13); Knoepfler 2002.

12 Parker 1996:46; Hope 2000:104.

2 The Governance of the Corpse: Modalities and Symbolisms of Non-normative Burials

As opposed to the refusal of burial, a process that seldom left an archaeological trace,[13] the mortuary record contains high-visibility non-normative burials,[14] which are characterized by significant deviations from the usual treatment of the dead (necro-normality), and which, in relation to the honours owed to the deceased, occupy an intermediate grey zone between honour and disgrace. A common feature of all these practices is the poor performance of the established rite either due to the inability of the human milieu of the deceased to meet the prescribed duties or to conscious disregard on the part of the community for disciplinary reasons or widespread superstition. Moreover, apart from the neglect of the care of the corpse, the wave of oblivion that erased the memory of the dead from the communal deathscape exacerbated the negative context of their burial treatment. For all these dead, anonymity and impersonality were the pitiful conclusion of their miserable lives. More specifically, in terms of the mode of interment, many non-normative burials are common pits, which have been carried out hastily and sloppily, without grave goods, or humble offerings. The choice of burial places also reflects a negative context: some non-normative burials are done in a non-funeral context such as abandoned wells or in peripheral areas (within or outside the community cemeteries), which implies marginalization or exclusion of these deceased from the public gaze and memory. Finally, the mistreatment of the remains, either by changing the usual position of the corpse or by mutilation or even by material 'stigmatization'[15] with the placement of instruments of restraint or capital punishment in the grave, is another characteristic of these burial deviations.

From the detailed study of the mortuary record I have been able to identify at least five types (**Types I–V**) of non-normative burial, and in this chapter, I will only briefly refer to selected, particularly typical cases:

1. **Unholy public mass burials (Type I)**[16] include people of all age groups, gender, and even social status who died under turbulent circumstances. While

13 The only exception is the dead who were found thrown into the chasm of Kaiadas (Sparta). Themelis 1982; Guzzo 2020:135–136 no. 3.

14 For a comprehensive approach to the issue, see Bosnakis 2020:241–257 (in English). For the discussion about the terms 'non-normative', 'unusual', 'deviant' etc., see Aspöck 2008; Bosnakis 2020:72–73 nos. 450–452, 90 no. 596; Hope 2000:108.

15 Cf. Goffman 1968:150–173.

16 Bosnakis 2020:93–110, with collected archaeological and literary data and detailed discussion.

the proper and honourable funeral process expresses the city's solid value system, social order, and cohesion, this category of non-normative burial reflects *polis* crisis and disruption either from natural causes and plagues (Type 1a) or from violent warfare (Type 1b).

Of these mass graves, two cases are associated with some certainty with victims of pandemics (Kerameikos 1:[17] last third of the 5th century BCE, Gerasa:[18] mid-sixth century CE) and eight others with war incidents and collateral damage (Megara Hyblaia:[19] 640–500 BCE, Kerameikos 2:[20] ca. 420 BCE, Himera 1: 480 BCE; 2–3: 409 BCE;[21] Olynthos:[22] ca. 430 BCE; Chania 1:[23] late 4th to early 3rd century BCE; Lete:[24] 2nd century BCE?; Ikaros/Failaka:[25] ca. 180 BCE).

For the archaeology of epidemics, the large communal grave at Kerameikos (**Kerameikos 1**), with its successive (or even simultaneous) discards in a short period of time (estimated 150 corpses), could be an excellent case study. In the beginning, as can be seen from the lower layers, the dead are placed with greater care and spaciousness, and they are also covered with a little soil. In the layers that succeeded the initial one, the pressing conditions seem to have dictated a hastier way of disposal, with the dead piled densely and without any care. In the upper level, eight infants were covered with large pottery sherds as an improvised pot burial. Surprisingly, these burials are accompanied by a few offerings: just thirty vessels among the scattered skeletal material, mainly of the lower layers, which indicates the increasing speed of the pandemic and the necessity for urgent disposal of the dead. This collective burial from Kerameikos 1 seems to confirm to some extent Thucydides' dramatic description (2.47–54) of the disregard for the fulfilment of burial customs and the shameless funerary procedures; it offers a rare glimpse of the devastating effect of the infectious disease on the social order of the city.[26]

For the identification of the dead in the mass burials as victims of an armed conflict or massacres of civilians, it would be necessary to detect injuries on the skeletal remains or skulls (either from blows with sharp weapons, swords,

17 Parlama and Stampolidis 2000:271–272 pls. 8–9; Baziotopoulou-Valavani 2002.
18 Hendrix 1995; Hendrix 1998.
19 Gras 1975:45, 50n33; Piccirilli 1975:67–73; De la Genière 1990:89n38.
20 Parlama and Stampolidis 2000:273 pl. 10.
21 Vassallo 2016; Vassallo 2017; Vassallo 2018.
22 Robinson 1942:163–165, Gr. 348, 350 (9 dead), 364 (26 dead), 70–71, 75–77, pls. XLIII, XLIV; cf. Houby-Nielsen 1995:133.
23 Bourbou and Niniou-Kindeli 2009; Bourbou 2015.
24 Savvopoulou 1986.
25 Maat et al. 1990; Petropoulou 2006.
26 Holladay and Poole 1979.

spears, or from fatal wounds with arrows or clubs). Unfortunately, in many cases skeletal analysis is missing. The remains in the makeshift mass graves at Himera 1, 2, Lete, and Failaka confirm the violent killing of the dead but those of Kerameikos 2 do not (victims of plague or war enemies?),[27] nor do those of Chania 1 (hanging?). In the cases of Olynthos and Himera 3 the victims include women and children.

For Type 1, apart from Thucydides' testimony, the dramatic narratives of Diodorus Siculus (12.58 and 19.45) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*The Roman Antiquities* 9.67.1–2 and 10.53.2–3) provide sufficient evidence for the non-observance of burial customs, as they describe the despair of people who experienced catastrophic events such as the plague, but also war, or civil uprisings (e.g. victims of collateral damages: Thucydides 5.84–116, 7.29–30; Diodorus Siculus 13.57; *staseis*: Thucydides 3.81–82, 4.49.6, Diodorus Siculus 15.57.3–58.4; slaughter of captives: Thucydides 3.32). The practice of 'unholy public mass burials' in all cases was a solution of necessity. In the case of epidemics, one might even speculate that the fear of infectious deaths may have played an even greater role in the quick and frugal treatment of corpses. But how did the Athenians, or at least public opinion, really perceive the plague? If the cause of the disease was due to divine wrath, then any hygienic measures would have been considered unnecessary. If they shared Thucydides' rationalism and judged it to be infectious, then it should have been dealt with using more practical measures, such as quarantines or proper burial of the dead.[28] All sources, however, suggest that there was chaos and a complete lack of rational management of the diseased and the dead.

One other subtle point is also worth commenting on, namely that all these mass burials could in no way be considered a different kind of 'public tomb', for there is no indication of a lasting marker and reminder of the collective trauma placed after the city returned to normality, as is observed in other cases of victims of e.g. catastrophic earthquakes;[29] neither is there any indication of respectful visitation by relatives and fellow citizens.[30] The absence of re-inscription of so many tragic victims in the public topography leads us

27 For the treatment of the enemy corpses: Lysias 2.7–8; Demosthenes 60.8. Rosivach 1983: 195–196; Fisher 1992:147; Cairns 1993:238–239; Harris 2004:38.

28 Longrigg 2000.

29 Diodorus Siculus 11.63 and Plutarch *Life of Cimon* 16.4. Also in Kamiros, IG XII.1.708 (= Tit. Cam 161). See also on victims in Rhodes after a flood or starvation after an earthquake, Diodorus Siculus 19.45; IG XII 1.9.

30 See Vassallo 2016:54 for the collective burial of Himera 1, which should not be perceived as a monument to victory, even if conducted following a battle, not unlike the Marathon tumuli. Cf. Patterson 2006:32–33.

to the conclusion that there was no public way of dealing with the common suffering, but only the absolute desire to forget.[31] The only recollection of the disastrous plague experience was probably the reference in the narrative background of the contemporary Athenian tragedy, as in the introduction of *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[32] Be that as it may, even if in these difficult circumstances the living buried the victims as best they could or should, the negative element remains, as the city never returned to commemorate these unfortunate dead.

2. As **private quiet burials (Type II)**[33] could be characterized the dumps in abandoned wells which involved, on the one hand, bodies of no social significance, such as outcasts and unwanted others (Type IIa), probably because of their physical deformities and defects, and, on the other, incomplete beings, non-personae, who had not been integrated into family ties, such as embryos, stillborns, and newborns (Type IIb).[34] Occasionally, the latter group may coexist with deposits of elderly persons,[35] but its distinctive feature is always the canine offerings.

Some adult disposals (Gr. 83-AA 362a and 29-AA 288)[36] in wells of the Protogeometric/Early Geometric and Early Geometric II periods around the Athenian Agora indicate a common practice for a social group with severe physical injuries. That group, possibly due to their dysfunctions, lived as social outcasts and therefore received that kind of deviant burial. But the few cups that accompanied them as grave goods could also be seen as expressions of sympathy, perhaps private little acts of resistance by a narrow human circle against the stifling framework of social exclusion in which they may have been forced to operate. The negative attitude towards people with physical deformities and their rejection due to feelings of embarrassment and shame they triggered in their social or family environment alludes to the Homeric world,

31 Cf. e.g. the case of the Cimitero delle Fontanelle in Naples (https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cimitero_delle_Fontanelle).

32 Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* 22–39, especially 169–171, 190–215. See Knox 1956:136–144; Vertoudakis and Papathomas 2020:118–120; cf. Finglass 2018:1–6.

33 Bosnakis 2020:110–137, with collected archaeological, anthropological, and literary data and detailed discussion.

34 Dubois 2018.

35 Little and Papadopoulos 1998; Papadopoulos 2000; Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder 2018, especially 26–38. Also, Sassù 2016:405–406 no. 58 (Lemnos, late Archaic, man with puppies!); Mastronuzzi and Tulumello 2016:27–29, 33–34 (Vaste, women disposals in Apulia, 2nd to 1st centuries BCE).

36 Papadopoulos and Smithson 2017:498–502 (Gr. 83) and 268–307 (Gr. 29).

such as e.g. Thersites (Homer *Iliad* 2.216–220)[37] and the lame Hephaestus, who was rejected by his own mother Hera (Homer *Iliad* 18.396–397 and *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 317–318).

Infants dumped in wells within urban areas are another group of interest. The best studied example of infant disposal in a non-funeral context comes from Athens: 449 infants and over 150 dogs were found in a second-century BCE well (in use for disposals from 165 to 150 BCE), along with the remains of one adult male and one child aged about eight years. In the so-called 'Bone Well',[38] on the north side of the Kolonos Agoraios, most of the infants were mainly newborn or full-term foetuses of viable gestational age. According to bioarchaeological analysis, the death of about 15% of newborns is attributed to complications during pregnancy. Approximately one quarter of all newborns have been diagnosed with bacterial meningitis, which suggests that the disease was a major threat and the main cause of infant mortality in Hellenistic Athens. A comparable discard has been found in Messene,[39] in a well next to the third-to-second-century BCE Agora, near the old Bouleuterion: 262 premature, newborn, and stillborn infants were retrieved, mixed with many dog bones and numerous sherds of cooking vessels (*chytrae*) and amphorae. A similar burial treatment of infants was found in a well from the first half of the 3rd century BCE to the north of the Sebasteion in Eretria.[40] It also contained skeletal remains of at least 19 infants and 1,100 dog bones.

All three cases suggest that some infants who died before reaching the time of formal recognition in the family (*amphidromia*)[41] did not receive a proper burial. They were disposed of in other, less accessible, but rather carefully defined places, which implies a practice of exclusion and avoidance of pollution that was consistent with the religious and cultural traditions of Hellenistic societies. The places were certainly well-known to the main participants in childbirth, such as midwives (Plato *Theaetetus* 160e–161a), whose opinion on the viability of the infant was in itself sufficient to reject a defective newborn. The exclusion of certain infants and young children (illegitimate, prostitute, or slave children?) from usual burial sites must have been a conscious decision by those involved. There is no written evidence to justify this, and anthropological parallels and modern Greek folklore can only make known the range of possible social and individual motivations behind this practice.

37 Cairns 1993:58.
38 Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder 2018.
39 Bourbou and Themelis 2010.
40 Chenal-Velarde 2006.
41 Hamilton 1984. Also: Aristotle *History of Animals* 7.12.588a; cf. Plutarch *Life of Numa* 12.2.

According to the relevant literary and archaeological evidence, it appears that dog sacrifices in the Greek world were associated with ambivalent and apotropaic divinities as well as purification rites (Plutarch *Life of Romulus* 21.8 and *Roman Questions* 68). This practice is consistent with the protective and liminal nature of the animal, which guards thresholds, entrances, and passageways.[42] When bisected and divided (Plutarch *Roman Questions* 111; Livy *The History of Rome* 40.6), the offerings reveal a need to keep two worlds apart: the outside world of the wilderness from the inside world of the *polis*, the chthonic from the celestial, the living from the dead. Assuming that the dogs are to be understood as offerings (since their bones bear no cut marks), their presence along with socially discarded infants in the wells of Hellenistic cities could be associated with Hecate Chthonia, Enodia or Artemis-Hecate, and it implies a distressing concern about *miasma*. The ritual logic of this very specific practice would be aimed both at symbolically facilitating the transition of the premature dead to the Underworld as well as at protecting the living from the *miasma* of their rejection. Dogs could be companions in their journey, but also guardians of the borders between the two worlds, or even metaphorically, symbols of their embarrassing identity, in the sense that they are the fruits of shameless sexual encounters, as attested by evidence from modern Greek folklore (e.g. Sfakia, Crete).[43]

Private quiet burials (Type 11b) could therefore be seen as a symbolic burial, by which society expresses its limited interest in social 'waste', and at the same time protects those involved from pollution by performing a very specific ritual.

3. Hasty shameful (mass or individual) burials (Type 111b)[44] are those of the fettered dead. In this burial practice the dead are marked by the metal shackles left on their bodies, signs of the restrictions on their movements. For the remaining bonds in the corpse, at least nineteen cases have been discovered so far, ten in Greece (Pydna, Akanthos, Phthiotides Thebes, Pharsalos, Kamariza, Kaiadas, Heraklion, Chania, Phaleron, and Delos), six in Italy (Pithecussae, Selinous, Akragas, Himera, Camarina, Piombino), and three more in France (Martigues), Albania (Selca e Poshtëme), and the Black Sea (Apollonia Pontica).

The identity and status of these dead cannot be confirmed with certainty in all cases (free citizens, foreigners, or slaves?), yet the type of burial suggests

42 De Grossi Mazzorin and Minniti 2006; Lacam 2008; Sassù 2016; Bosnakis 2020:123–137.

43 Bosnakis 2020:86–87.

44 Guzzo 2020, with collected literature for each case; Bosnakis 2020:137, 140–158, with collected archaeological and literary data and detailed discussion.

offensive behaviour on the part of the living.[45] The purpose of this burial mode is not certain, but the punitive fetters that have been left on the corpse suggest continuous social stigmatization, albeit rather ambiguous as to its motive and content.

A mass burial dated to the latter half of the 4th century BCE was discovered in the northern cemetery of ancient Pydna.[46] Within a rectangular rock-cut shaft, approximately 115 individuals were found hastily deposited without any sign of individual care. The excavators identified four successive depositional levels of varying numbers of corpses (57 in the earliest level, 2 in the intermediate, 45 in the succeeding, and 11 in the latest and final level). Within the shaft, some objects interpreted as personal belongings of the deceased may be considered grave goods.[47] Typologically, the mass burial at Pydna corresponds to that of Kerameikos 1, which contains the victims of the Athenian plague. An iron strigil also recalls the burial at Chania 1 and raises questions regarding the social identity of the deceased. Apart from its collective character, the distinctive feature of the burial in Pydna is that four skeletons had iron shackles on them. In level A, an individual bore a neck band, while another from level B bore a manacle and a fetter. More individuals from level D had their legs restrained through pairs of iron fetters. Macroscopic osteological analysis of 58 out of 115 skeletons from the upper levels revealed a nearly equal number of males and females of all age grades (42 adults and 16 youths, 6 to 18 years old). The average age of death for men and women was during early adulthood. Very few individuals reached the first threshold of 30 to 40 years of age, or maturity at 40 to 50 years, while individuals older than 50 years were not reported. There is no evidence for a violent cause of death. Instead, there are indications of severe malnutrition and musculoskeletal deformation because of repetitive heavy labour. Difficult living conditions combined with continuous activity and inadequate diet contributed, perhaps in combination with a contagious disease, undetectable in the bones, to the simultaneous premature deaths of adolescents and young adults alike. The identity of these tormented dead should be sought, according to the excavators, in slaves and captives, in the context of the slave trade in Macedonia during the second half of the 4th

45 It is not easy to establish a convincing relationship between the two cases of right hands buried alone without the rest of the body (Marseille) and the commission of suicide (**Type IIIa**), despite their high visibility and Aeschines' testimony (3.244), which is problematic as to its real meaning; see Garrison 1991:9–10; Bosnakis 2020:138–140.

46 Triantaphyllou and Bessios 2005; Guzzo 2020:157–160 no. 14.

47 Burials of some fettered dead are also accompanied by grave goods, see Guzzo 2020, nos. 5 (Selinous), 8 (Akragas), 10 (Camarina).

century BCE.[48] The mass grave of Pydna again raises the question if there was anything resembling the Roman *puticuli* in Greek cities for victims of epidemics, the poor, or unwanted slaves.[49]

Shackled dead have also been discovered in individual graves. Dispersed throughout the north-western area of the public cemetery of Akanthos,[50] without offerings, lying within mostly individual shallow pit graves, 12 skeletons (out of a total of 11,098 tombs) bearing fetters on their ankles have been uncovered. In the absence of a study of the skeletal material, their age, sex, and the circumstances resulting in their deaths shall remain unclear. For the presence of the 12 bound dead of Akanthos, two observations can be made: first, that at a certain period they were treated in the same way by the inhabitants of Akanthos—perhaps either as members of the same social group or because they had committed the same crime or one of similar severity; and second, although the duration of their confinement is unknown, that they each died separately, but bound for life, and destitute, as the absence of any grave goods suggests, and were buried rudimentarily inside the main city's cemetery (by members of the same group, by public officials?).

Fetters in antiquity, as attested in the literary sources, had a variety of uses: they could be put on prisoners of war, incarcerated convicts, common criminals (thieves, public debtors, etc).[51] According to Demosthenes (22.68; 24.114), the imposition of such restraints constituted a process of systematic humiliation, since the one shackled bore the disdain and contempt for the rest of his days. Fetters on the ankles of prisoners or slaves, either as punishment, or to deter a potential attempt at escape, permitted labour in free space to an extent, but the weighty bonds would severely restrict any movements and increase fatigue. For convicts, the sheer heaviness of the burden alone would induce a slow death from exhaustion, especially in the context of hard labour in quarries or mines.[52] Fixed shackles hinted at the impossibility of release for the one

48 On the funerary stele of Aulus Caprilius, a freedman and slave trader, from Amphipolis of the 1st century BCE or CE, a scene depicting a procession of slaves chained from the neck affirms that trafficking was indeed flourishing at least in later times; see Kolendo 1978:26–32; Duchêne 1986:522–525.

49 See above n. 7.

50 Trakosopoulou 2005; Guzzo 2020:154–157 no. 13.

51 Ducrey 1999:219–221; Thompson 1994; Hunter 1994; Hunter 1997; Hunter 2000; Bosnakis 2020:151–158; Syrkou in this volume (pp. 193–195).

52 See the case of Kamariza (East Attica), where only the lower limbs of a probably punished slave associated with the miners of Laurion were found, and these were chained at the ankles; Thompson 2003:150–151 pl. 47. Cf. Morris 2011:178, 186–187.

bound.[53] Of course, in addition to the metal shackles, physical restraint could also be achieved with organic materials, as is at least indicated in some cases by the strange posture of the body.[54] Whether fixed or removable, the shackles that remain on the corpse identify the deceased as condemned and indicate the decision of the living (perhaps taken by only part of the community) to preserve the stigma, possibly out of disregard for that particular social group, or to emphasize the 'imprisonment' of the individual even after death. As we know, slaves were buried under the responsibility of their masters (Demosthenes 43.58), so the chains on the corpse may have served as a disciplinary measure for the others.

In any case, on the question of the identity of the bound dead, we must admit the complicity of both practical and symbolic meaning in the use of shackles. Furthermore, there are examples of certain convicts interred in shackles as an act of retribution for the rage and fear they inspired during their lifetime.[55] In this case we would have to assume that there was probably a popular belief that the corpse retained a sense of self and identity. Therefore, apart from the apparent contempt for the dead, who were condemned to eternal bondage (interpreted literally or symbolically), there may also have been underlying social insecurities and superstitions.

4. Hasty demeaning public mass burials (Type IV)[56] intended for the dead with criminal or illegal behaviour, especially convicts who were executed in public view and possibly by public authorities (by *apotympanismos*? or crucifixion). These burials exude social disdain and neglect as well as the conscious and dishonourable stigmatization of the corpses, which are carelessly placed together with the instruments that caused the death (collars, nails).

The seventeen iron-bound individuals that were discovered in a pit of Phaleron[57] are frequently identified as executed convicts. Although the site was first excavated in 1915, many questions remain unanswered about the location, the specific use of the cemetery and the dating of the burial, and particularly

53 Kolendo 1978:33–34, who makes an interesting iconographic observation that fetters or leg irons were used for slaves who worked the land, handcuffs for prisoners, and tied hands behind the back for prisoners of war.

54 Cf. Reynolds 2009:40, 44, who expresses the view that, in the case of hands, binding behind or in front is a strong argument that it is a villain, perhaps executed by hanging. In addition, intense flexion of the arms is a sign of violent death.

55 Herodotus 5.72–73; Guzzo 2020:177–179.

56 Bosnakis 2020:159–169, with detailed discussion.

57 Guzzo 2020:133–135 no. 2.

the identity of, and crime committed by, these convicts. In a relatively shallow trench, the dead were found lying next to each other in two or more successive layers, oriented from east to west. Bonds were fixed around their necks, on their hands and their ankles, with remnants of wood to which they had been attached. According to the interpretation first proposed (and still relevant) after a thorough study of the literary sources in 1923 by A. Keramopoullos, this is a case of capital punishment by *apotympanismos*,[58] a mode of disciplinary execution in public display probably already in force in pre-Solonian times (cf. Plato *Laws* 855c).[59] The offenders, naked and with the shackles not piercing their flesh, were firmly fastened to wide wooden boards, the so-called drums, which were placed in an upright position. Hanging from the boards without food or water, they suffered slowly and painfully from the pressure of their own bodies, which resulted in the crushing of their limbs, as confirmed by the condition of one skeleton, whose limbs were torn and split in two. But this could also be attributed to the frenzy of the crowd in attendance, who probably hurled stones and beat the condemned men. The torture of *apotympanismos*, in the absence of a merciful *coup de grâce* through the crushing of the head, could be prolonged for up to ten days.[60] The mass grave of the captives did not contain offerings of any kind, which complicates its dating. Some scholars have proposed an early date in the 7th century BCE (Keramopoullos associated execution by *apotympanismos* with the Draconian law) and others have opted for a later date in the middle of the 5th century BCE, following the abandonment of the cemetery reserved for ordinary citizens.[61] The location of the mass grave at the edge of a three-way crossroads[62] is fully compatible with the Greeks' popular beliefs concerning execution places, which were progressively transformed into landmarks of collective memory.[63] The Phaleron find attests that after the imposition of the death penalty, the bodies of certain criminals did not necessarily remain unburied.[64]

The crucial question of the identity and the nature of the crime committed is exceptionally challenging to answer. Keramopoullos's interpretation of the executed as thieves or pirates who were apprehended in the open sea or dur-

58 Keramopoullos 1923:21–36; Gernet 1981:240–248; Balamoshev 2011; Couvenhes 2014. Cf. Latte 1940:1606–1607.

59 Cf. Hope 2000:112.

60 Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 28.2 (= FGrH 76 F 67). Karakantza 2022:212–213.

61 Keramopoullos 1923:106.

62 Keramopoullos 1923:48–50.

63 Plato *Republic* 439e–440a. Allen 2000:203.

64 Keramopoullos 1923:40, 99.

ing a raid conducted on a coastal area of Attica has been positively received and seems possible.[65] A bronze arrowhead which was pressed against an individual's sternum could allude to a skirmish or confrontation; however, any additional reading calls for further research.

The excavation of the site was repeated in 2012/2013–2015/2016, in an area of about 3,000 square metres, as part of the construction of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre.[66] The period during which the site was used as a regular cemetery was long, from the late 8th to the 4th century, according to the latest estimate of the excavators. The large number of burials (1,797 in total) on the site present a great variety, and among them new mass burials have come to light: a similarly untended mass burial of sixteen dead with their hands tied behind their backs when thrown into the trench, and another group (2016) of many executed men (79 in total), in three rows. These dead were probably buried at different times. The western row (Row 1) contained two groups of fettered individuals (47 in total). The main group of individuals bore shackles on their wrists (32 out of 40 individuals), while on one (no. 1253) there are traces of an iron bond on the right knee. The rest (15) had their hands bound behind their back with some perishable material, as no metal bonds were found. Middle Row 2 contained sixteen skeletons with the hands behind the back without metal cuffs either. Eastern Row 3 also contained sixteen shackled skeletons of individuals that had been dumped in the trench and executed on the spot. Several skeletons in all three rows have skulls with fractures, which are reported to have been caused before their deaths; they are likely to have received them while kneeling in the trench. A stone slab placed in the last row, as in some other graves in the cemetery, was considered by the excavators a marker for the burial of the executed. According to S. Chrysoulaki,[67] the new mass burials are related to violent episodes of the end of the 7th century BCE that brought political, social, and economic turmoil to the city, but, in my view, the chronological evidence for the burials seems to be not strong enough. One could even speculate, for instance, among other possible suggestions, that some of the Athenian supporters of the Athenian Revolution of 508/7 BCE,[68] who were summarily executed, could have been buried in these common graves—in the relevant passage of Herodotus (5.72.4–5.73.1) the executed are in fact described as bound men.

65 Keramopoullos 1923:19, 42–45, 56–57; Latte 1940:1606.

66 Ingvarsson and Bäckström 2019.

67 Ingvarsson and Bäckström 2019:11–12n11.

68 Ober 1996; Ober 2007.

Particularly significant is a mass burial in Rhodes[69] with 29 (?) dead, which is dated with reservations to the 1st century CE. As nails pierced the body parts of the deceased, one between the wrist bones and the other at the bottom of the shin and at the beginning of the tarsus bones, there is strong evidence that they were executed by crucifixion.[70] Could the group burial be related to the Romans' retaliation for their own people having been killed by impalement? According to Dio Cassius (*Roman History* 60.24.4), this highly hostile act became the reason for the emperor Claudius to deprive the Rhodians of *libertas*. The existence of 38 lead *defixiones* found among the corpses confirms that the boundaries between the living and the dead are porous and the place of burial of those who suffered a violent death had long been known to the sorcerers.[71]

Based on a passage from Herodotus (9.78.3; cf. 9.120), it seems that the practices of crucifixion and impalement are identical. The verbs κρεμάω and κρεμάννυμι (to hang and be hanging) can also denote crucifixion, while the related practices of crucifixion include the Greek method of execution referred to by the term *apotympanismos*. During the Republican period, Roman crucifixion was inflicted on slaves and on public enemies, as in the army on traitors and those who abandoned arms. The *lex Puteolana*,[72] of the Augustan or Julio-Claudian era, confirms the use of crucifixion for slaves, freedmen (*liberti*), and strangers (*peregrini*), and occasionally for citizens, as *crudelissimi taeterrimique supplici* 'the cruellest and vilest penalty', according to Cicero's definition (*Against Verres* 2.5.165). In later times crucifixion became an accepted mode of execution for free citizens as well.

5. Finally, certain burials could be described as **private submission rituals (Type v)**[73] because of the various ways in which the corpse is abused (mutilation and trapping in the grave—Type v.1; and prone position in the grave—Type v.2).

Two inhumations of individuals with boulders placed over their chests and others who had their ankles and lower limbs mutilated have been discovered within a necropolis at Lagonisi (ancient deme of Thorai, Attica, from the Late

69 Bosnakis 2020:169–172, with discussion.

70 Cook 2014.

71 Gager 1992:18–20; Bernstein 1993:84–106; Hope 2000:121–122.

72 Hinard and Dumont 2003; Cook 2012.

73 Bosnakis 2020:172–180, with collected archaeological and literary data and detailed discussion.

Geometric to the middle of the Classical period).[74] Marks of cranial deformation have been observed in three of the burials. Both the placement of boulders and the mutilation of limbs have been interpreted by the excavators as modes of obstruction, preventing the dead from transitioning into a new state. But it is more likely that mutilations were rather imposed on corpses to prevent any harmful action by the dead upon their presumed return to the world of the living: a maimed corpse would not constitute a serious threat. The practice of *maschalismos*, attested in literature only,[75] was applied to the body of a murder victim, and it aimed at the arrival of the deceased in the Underworld utterly disgraced. However, it also implied, according to Aeschylus, necrophobic beliefs concerning the possible vengeance of the spirit of the deceased. Although the nature of the belief is not clear, it seems likely that the body is thought to retain its identity even after its life has been extinguished. The narrative about the revenant of Temesa[76] is highly instructive about how far the living can go to control a malevolent spirit; they are even willing to erect a temple for appeasement.

Necrophobia and measures against it have been plausibly identified in two individual burials at Passo Marinaro (at Camarina on Sicily, dated between the 5th and the 3rd centuries BCE).[77] In one of these cases (Tomb 653), the remains, particularly the head and the legs, of a malnourished or ailing individual accompanied by modest offerings (a *lekythos* and an *unguentarium*) were pinned against the ground with sizeable and weighty amphora sherds. In the second interment (Tomb 693), five boulders covered the skeletal remains of a child of unspecified sex between 8 and 13 years of age, trapping it inside the grave.

Placing the corpse in a prone position (*procubitus*), which is attested as early as the Neolithic period, is perhaps another practice to prevent the possible return of an angry spirit, a widespread belief for those who suffered a violent or untimely death. It has been suggested that the position hints at a magic ritual involving the immobilization of the corpse so that the soul cannot escape its mouth.[78] In relevant archaeological evidence from Greece, one does not frequently come across references to the prone position, contrary to publications

74 Tsaravopoulos and Papathanasiou 2006:118 pls. 1.2–3; Papathanasiou and Tsaravopoulos 2016:263 pls. 6–7; cf. Tsaliki 2008:9–10 pl. 1.2.

75 Aeschylus *Libation Bearers* 434–443; Sophocles *Electra* 444–446; Hesychius s.v. 'μασχαλίσματα'. Johnston 1999:158. Cf. the mutilation of corpses in Rome, Hope 2000:113–114.

76 Pausanias 6.6.7–11; Strabo 6.1.5.

77 Sulosky-Weaver 2015:211–217, esp. 211–212 pl. 6.1.

78 Aspöck 2008:19–20; Rossi 2011:171–173.

on the Roman West (Patavium, Iberia, Britain).[79] Nevertheless, there are some brief references to specific cases,[80] such as the burial of a seven-year-old child in the settlement of Toumba in Thessaloniki (end of 12th/beginning of 11th century BCE), three burials (grave nos. 6, 12, and 9) in a cemetery near the settlement of Polichni (Lebet) at Stavroupoli, at Akanthos, some dead amidst the new mass burials at Phaleron, and, lastly, an individual burial of the Roman period at Heraklion in Crete.[81]

The particular dead for whom these non-normative burials were invented must have been considered *a priori* restless and dangerous, either because of their premature or violent deaths or because during their lifetime they had displayed hardly controllable powers and properties or even because they had suffered from mental disorders and infectious diseases. That kind of burial undoubtedly suggests superstition and social concern about actions of the deceased after death.[82]

The ideological motives for the performance of Types III–V could be understood to some extent if placed in the context of the Homeric abuse and dishonouring of the corpse of the enemy. After all, the earliest literary evidence of 'deviant' burial concerns Ajax, for whom (dishonourable) interment was chosen over the standard (honourable) cremation because of Agamemnon's wrath.[83] In the world of the *Iliad*, the abuse of the corpse or its mutilation (ἀεικίζειν[84]) impart 'shameful death' to the body of the deceased. The deliberate placement of the corpse in a prone position in the tomb can be considered, under certain conditions, as an element of disgrace and mistreatment in the context of the Homeric 'ritual of submission'.[85] The interpretation of the relevant burials in the concept of degradation and insult is not irrelevant to the perceptions of the ancient world,[86] since already in the Homeric epics, the denial of the due funeral honours signified dejection and blame (κατηφείη καὶ ὄνειδος, Homer *Iliad* 16.498 and 17.556) not just for the deceased and his memory,

79 Aspöck 2008:17–19 pl. 2.1, 21–25; Moliner et al. 2003:85–86; Boylston et al. 2000; Rossi 2011.

80 Acheilara 2007; Kefalidou 2010:19–21, with collected data. Also, Papadopoulos and Smithson 2017:495–498, 500, 557–558, 592, pl. 2; 381–385.

81 Roussaki et al. 2019:8–10 pl. 10 (Grave 82).

82 Cf. Plato *Laws* 865d–e.

83 *Little Iliad* fr. 3. Davies 1988:54; Garcia 2013:252. On the importance of fear and shame in running a city cf. Sophocles *Ajax* 1079–1080. Fisher 1992:311–329. See also Karakantza in this volume (pp. 78–81).

84 Segal 1971:15; Rosivach 1983:197 no. 16; Vernant 1991:63–70. Cf. Tyrtaeus 10.25 (West).

85 Rosivach 1983:196–199; Cairns 1993:48–146; Kefalidou 2010:16.

86 Fisher 1992:38: "The necessary criterion for hybris is the presence of an intention to insult and cause dishonour." Nagy 1999:222–242, 253–264.

but also for his wider social milieu.[87] The notions of blaming and shaming throughout Classical antiquity[88] took the form of either traditional practices of public shaming,[89] or even legislative proposals, such as Plato's approaches to ideal civil justice (*Laws*, *Republic*).[90]

3 Conclusion

The study of non-normative burial practices provides an exciting new opportunity to reconstruct the silenced and complementary facets of the social system of the Greek cities. While non-normative burials (Types II and V) are archaeologically attested as early as the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, most of them (Types I–III and V) are attested during the Classical and Hellenistic periods, an era in which the mobility of people, goods and ideas increased. Type IV, which is recorded from the Archaic (?) period as the execution method of *apotympanismos*, is not confirmed by excavation in the Classical period (only literary evidence exists dated to the last quarter of the 5th century BCE for the Samian defectors) and was replaced during the Roman period by crucifixion. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the archaeological data have so far confirmed most of the deviations from necro-normality (Types Ia–b, Types IIa–b, Types III–V), covering all periods, mainly in Athens. Athens was the most complex and ever-changing society, whose citizens were constantly meeting new ideas and debating changes or reforms of their existing laws and institutions.

To sum up: the reasons and motives behind the performance of non-normative burials, except in cases of plague or earthquake, can only be deduced to some extent—but still elusively and suggestively—by painstaking cross-checking of the literary sources. Two interesting ideas emerge from the research: first, that deviant burials, because of their diffusion and repeated application over time, constitute a negative but complementary part of the funerary language; and second, that they suggest either strategies of management in specific (extreme) circumstances or strategies of negotiation with specific categories of the dead (either because of their way of life or because of their way of death). The aim in both cases was to maintain in every way possible the social order and cohesion.

87 Aeschines 2.181–182. Cairns 1993:268, 432–433. Cf. Kucewicz and Syrkou in this volume.
88 Fisher 1992.
89 Forsdyke 2008.
90 Hunter 2011.

In fact, individuality and memory are the main keys to describe these deviations from necro-normality; the neglect or abuse of the corpse is associated with the destruction of individual identity and the erasure of the memory of the deceased.[91] In the first type, the city reacted reflexively and under the pressure of necessity. In the second type, people invented a symbolic interment for the social pariahs and unincorporated young individuals and thus protected the members of the community from the *miasma* with the befitting rite. The third and fourth types as disciplinary practices demonstrate that the *polis* had the power to subdue and restore to its norms any deviant behaviour. It seems that the fifth type, with the different variations, was dictated by a mixture of folk superstitions aiming at the aversion of, and relief from, necrophobic anxieties. Finally, non-normative burials in the context of the circumstances of their performance allow us to map the extreme limits to which societies or individuals can go when they are threatened—or believe they are threatened—acting sometimes as victims and sometimes as perpetrators.[92] Although the suspension of the established burial rite is combined in all these cases with pointless violence (*hubris*) inflicted on the corpse,[93] the living members of the community largely seem to be aware of, and accept, that human personhood can be degraded or insulted, especially under specific circumstances or with a certain intention. That is apparently the case of almost all the dead in this grey zone. As the cases we have discussed show, it was not only the material and mental issues raised by the death of specific categories of social members that were integrated, in a complex and rather elusive way, into the social imaginary and institutional landscape of the Greek *poleis*, but also the relations of these categories of dead with the living, and, above all, the beliefs that governed the organization of these relations.

To take this a step further, I could argue that these informal burials reflect a kind of almost undeclared politics of death that the dominant social group constantly establishes and enforces with its own rules in order to maintain its own structures and values.

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91 Cf. Hope 2000:126.

92 Cf. Sophocles *Ajax* 1067–1070.

93 Cf. Homer *Iliad* 24.54. Fisher 1992:180–181.

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CHAPTER 8

Necropolitical Violence and Roman Power in Imperial Greek Biography and Historiography

Katerina Oikonomopoulou

1 Necropolitical Violence in Republican Rome: The Greek Perspective

This chapter will discuss the role necropolitical violence plays in the accounts of Roman Republican history provided by the imperial Greek biographer and philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea and the imperial Greek historians Appian and Cassius Dio. The term 'necropolitical violence', as I use it, denotes, according to Bargu's definition,

> those acts that target the dead bodies of those killed in armed conflict, by way of their mutilation, dismemberment, denuding, desecration, dragging, and public display, the destruction of local cemeteries and other sacred spaces that are designated for communication with and commemoration of the dead, the delay, interruption, or suspension of the conduct of funerary rituals, the imposition of mass or anonymous interment, the pressure for clandestine interment, and the repression and dispersion of funeral processions for the newly dead.[1]

As our three authors narrate in vivid detail, acts of necropolitical violence were rampant during the period of the so-called 'Crisis of the Roman Republic', which began with the failed agrarian reforms of the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus and their assassination (133–121 BCE), continued with the bloody conflict of Marius and Cinna with Sulla (83–81 BCE), and culminated in the proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate (43 BCE) in the aftermath of Julius Caesar's assassination. All such acts were directed 'within', that is, against Rome's internal body politic (its own citizens), thus exposing deep fissures in its social and political fabric. As is well known, the majority, if not all, of the

1 Bargu 2016 (= 2019:213). This conception builds on, but also extends, Achille Mbembe's definition of necropolitics; see Mbembe 2019:66–92. For a brief survey of the development of these concepts, see the Introduction to this volume.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_009

crises that underpinned them had socio-economic as well as political roots, originating in conflicts between the *populares* and *optimates* about political and economic reform. Plutarch, Appian, and Cassius Dio are (like most of their Roman counterparts who offer parallel accounts of these episodes) aristocrats and write history and biography which, for the most part, identify with the version of historical events espoused by the *optimates*.[2] According to them, reforms were deleterious to the Roman Republican state, and reformers were factionalists or revolutionaries who sought to overturn the established order or, worse still, to upend it with dictatorial regimes. Nevertheless, neither historian offers a completely one-dimensional account of these crises, and in particular the ways in which they portray the role necropolitical violence played in them yield rich insights into how they integrate conflicting versions of historical events into their writings or process their significance.[3] In this way, their narratives allow their Greek readers more than one point of entry into the world of Republican Rome and the role it played in the formation of their current imperial reality.

Albeit well-integrated within the Roman imperial system, and enjoying an intellectual renaissance especially during the first three centuries CE (the period of the so-called 'Second Sophistic'),[4] imperial Greeks were aware of and constantly problematized their position as conquered peoples and subjects of a vast and powerful empire.[5] Accounts of Roman Republican history served, among other things, as a tool for self-reflection, offering a means of understanding both which social and political factors brought about this result and how the Greeks' current position might compare to how things used to be. Not accidentally, foremost in our three historians' minds when they narrate Roman acts of necropolitical violence directed against fellow Romans is the charged notion of *stasis* (civil conflict or strife), invested with distinctly imperial Greek preoccupations. In the context of imperial Greek views on *polis*-history, *stasis*

2 On Appian's social and political profile, see the discussion by Millar 1964:73–118; Brodersen 1993:339–363; Hahn 1993:364–402; Hose 1994:142–146, 258–273, 283–301; Gabba and Magnino 2001:9–11, 14–39. On Cassius Dio's social and political profile, see Hose 1994:356–360, 389–399, 427–432; Hose 2007:461–467; Urso 2016:13–32; Madsen 2020:1–23. On Plutarch's attitude to Roman politics, see Pelling 1995:319–356 (= Pelling 2002:207–236).

3 See, e.g., Urso 2016 on the portrayal of Sulla by Cassius Dio.

4 On the cultural phenomenon of the Second Sophistic, see esp. the studies by Swain 1996 and Whitmarsh 2001.

5 The bibliography on this topic is vast. On Plutarch's, Appian's, and Cassius Dio's attitudes to Roman power in its relationship to Hellenic culture, see especially Swain 1996:135–186, 248–253, 401–408; also Bowie 2014:39–78; Madsen 2014:16–38; Madsen and Rees 2014a:1–15; Schmitz 2014:32–42; Stadter 2014:13–31; Markov 2022:109–137.

was thought to be an inherent feature of Greek city-states during the Archaic and Classical periods. For Plutarch especially, reminding his readers of its deleterious presence in the life of Greek cities prior to the advent of Rome serves to undermine any potentially dangerous nostalgia about the Greeks' lost freedom cultivated by the oratorical performances of the imperial sophists (which tended to romanticize the Greek Classical past and especially the glorious victories of the Greeks against the Persians).[6] With reference to Roman history, *stasis* was seen as an inherent feature of the Roman Republican state, which contributed to its ultimate downfall.[7] Cassius Dio in fact dates it back to the very foundation of Rome by Romulus, whose conflict with his brother Remus for predominance, ending in the latter's murder, "sums up Roman history until the time of Augustus."[8] At the root of both perceptions lies a favourable view of the Roman imperial state as a stabilizing force and as a political formation that has (finally) brought about peace.[9]

Rome's transformation into an imperialist state and global power during the Republican period prompted many Roman and Greek historians to consider to what extent this may have brought about fundamental changes to its moral fabric.[10] Plutarch, Appian, and Cassius Dio share this preoccupation,[11] and the fact that necropolitical violence surfaced in Rome during precisely the same historical period may well have prompted their readers to reflect on whether the two phenomena were in fact interlinked. In the tradition of the Roman triumph, the captured leaders of defeated nations were paraded in the streets, in a humiliating show that emphasized Rome's ultimate superiority. Such was the fate of the Gallic leader Vercingetorix, who was displayed at Caesar's first triumph of his Gallic victories in 46 BCE, and others.[12] Some (though not all) of these eminent prisoners were subsequently executed, but it is doubtful whether their execution was itself part of the triumphal spectacle, nor are there testimonies of subsequent, post-mortem abuse.[13]

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6 See esp. Aalders 1982:51–53; Hershbell 2004:151–162; Zadorojnyi 2005:113–115; Pelling 2014: 149–162.

7 Lange 2019:165–189 and Madsen 2020, on Cassius Dio.

8 Lange 2019:176.

9 On this underlying notion in Appian and Cassius Dio, see Millar 1964:73–118; Hahn 1993; Hose 1994:258–266, 389–417; Kemezis 2014:104–149; Madsen 2020:25–56; Madsen 2022: 80–108; Markov 2022.

10 See esp. Baronowski 2011, on Polybius; Vasaly 2018, on Livy; Schumate 2012:476–503, on postcolonial approaches to Tacitus.

11 On this question in Appian, see Hahn 1993:383–389; for Cassius Dio, see Hose 1994:364–388; Bertrand 2019:13–35.

12 As described by Cassius Dio 40.41.3, 43.19. See also Beard 2007:107–142.

13 Beard 2007:128–132. See also Lange 2016:92–114, on Cassius Dio's descriptions of triumphs.

On the other hand, the practice of brutalizing the bodies of dead foes and mocking them post mortem is attributed by Plutarch to Rome's barbarian enemies or oriental allies. In his *Life of Crassus*, for example, Plutarch mentions that the Parthians cut off the head of Publius and the head and right hand of Crassus after they were both killed in the battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE (25.14 and 31.7, respectively). The Parthian general Surena, Plutarch informs us, sent Crassus' severed head and hand to king Orodes, who was in Armenia at that time (32.1).[14] He also staged a mockery of a Roman triumph at Seleucia, by dressing a Roman captive who impersonated Crassus in women's clothes and parading him in the streets. The procession included courtesans, who sang lewd songs that mocked Crassus' effeminacy and cowardice, and lictors, who, instead of axes, carried the severed heads of Roman soldiers on their *fasces* (32.1–4). "[A]nd these things were for all to see" (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν πάντες ἐθεῶντο, 32.3), Plutarch stresses.[15] Crassus' head reached king Orodes during his son's wedding banquet, at a moment when he and his guests were enjoying a performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* (33.1–2). The head was received by the guests with joy and applause, and it was then used as a prop in the tragic performance: the tragic actor Jason and Exathres, Crassus' putative assassin (31.6), both impersonated Agave, taking the head in their hands and reciting lines 1169–1171 and 1179 of the *Bacchae* at the performance (33.4–6).[16]

According to Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*, Pompey too suffered post-mortem defilement in the hands of his assassins in Egypt (48 BCE): after Ptolemy XIII's three assassins succeeded in murdering Pompey, they cut off his head, threw his unclothed body into the water, "and left it for those who craved so pitiful a sight" (τοῖς δεομένοις τοιούτου θεάματος ἀπέλιπον, 80.2).[17] Pompey's freedman Philip "stayed by the body, until such had taken their fill of gazing" (παρέμεινε δὲ αὐτῷ Φίλιππος, ἕως ἐγένοντο μεστοὶ τῆς ὄψεως, 80.3), wrapped it in his tunic and prepared a funeral pyre on the beach. Pompey's severed head was subsequently brought to Caesar, who could not hide his aversion to the person who handed it to him (ὡς παλαμναῖον ἀπεστράφη, 80.7) and shed tears when he saw Pompey's signet ring. He had the assassins executed and sent Pompey's remains to his wife, who arranged for their burial (80.7–10).

14 All section numbering for Plutarch's *Lives* in this chapter follows the Teubner edition by Ziegler (revised by Gärtner and Lindskog [1993–2002]).

15 All translations from the *Life of Crassus* are by Perrin 1916.

16 For a detailed discussion of this scene and its Dionysiac associations, see Braund 1993:468–474; Zadorojnyi 1997:169–182; Mossman 2014:437–448.

17 All translations from the *Life of Pompey* are by Perrin 1917.

In both Plutarchan accounts, severing the head of the vanquished enemy serves both as evidence of the enemy's death (note that, in both cases, the severed head has to be transported elsewhere, in order to reach the victor in the conflict) and as a war trophy for the victorious side. In the latter function, the dismembered corpse becomes a public spectacle which openly proclaims the victor's achievement. The gruesome remains are subsequently abused further: they are denied burial and denuded; they are gazed at or handled with joy and satisfaction by members of the victorious side; and they become objects of mockery and ridicule, as Crassus' remains do during the *Bacchae* performance at the Armenian court. In the same vein, Surena's mockery of the Roman triumph, albeit not featuring Crassus' remains, compounds the insult to the memory of his vanquished opponent and the cultural system which he represents. It is significant, in this context, that, according to Plutarch, Caesar was appalled by Pompey's humiliating treatment, despite being its primary beneficiary: this reaction casts positive light on both the man himself and the Roman value system, showing that the honourable treatment of the dead was of paramount importance in its context.

As we will see below in detail, Plutarch, Appian, and Cassius Dio's accounts of the manner in which Romans brutalized the bodies of fellow Romans during civil conflicts exhibit alarming parallels to the above-described practices, which Plutarch attributes to non-Romans. The question could therefore be raised whether Rome's imperialist expansion was the hidden cause behind the adoption of such brutal barbarian practices, leading to a consideration of a deeper link between violence (directed 'within', as well as 'without') and power.

2 The Roots of Necropolitical Violence in Republican Rome: The Gracchi and the Conflict between Marius and Sulla

It is clear that the books of Appian's *Civil Wars* were composed in order to demonstrate the barbarity of civil strife.[18] Set against the broader plan of Appian's *Roman History*,[19] the books vividly depict an 'inward' and internecine stage in Rome's expansionist policy, with a pronounced emphasis on acts of cruelty, violence and barbarity perpetrated against fellow Italians or fellow Romans. Necropolitical violence features prominently among them, and Appian allows us to comprehend some of its key connotations early on in his narrative.

18 See Hose 1994:254–258; Gabba and Magnino 2001:26–39.

19 On the broader aims of Appian's *Histories*, see remarks by Hose 1994:344–355.

Appian locates the beginning of armed civil conflict in the circumstances surrounding the killing of Tiberius Gracchus and his followers (133 BCE, *The Civil Wars* 1.2). This, as he argues in his preface (1.1–6), led to escalated acts of violence in every subsequent conflict:

> They [sc. rival factions during civil conflicts] attacked Rome as if it were an enemy city (ὡς ἐς πολεμίαν), and there were indiscriminate massacres of anyone in the way (σφαγαὶ τῶν ἐν ποσὶν ἐγίγνοντο νηλεεῖς). Others were sentenced to death, banished, or had their property confiscated, some even subjected to excruciating tortures.
>
> *Civil Wars* 1.2[20]

This trajectory is marked within his narrative: the bodies of Tiberius Gracchus and his followers "were thrown at night into the stream of the river" (πάντας αὐτοὺς νυκτὸς ἐξέρριψαν εἰς τὸ ῥεῦμα τοῦ ποταμοῦ, 1.16), a refusal to grant them proper burial rites after the violence perpetrated against them by the senators on the Capitoline Hill (1.16).[21] The severed heads of his brother Gaius Gracchus and of his supporter consul Fulvius Flaccus were brought to the consul Opimius, "who gave their weight in gold to those who brought them" (καὶ αὐτοῖς ὁ Ὀπίμιος ἰσοβαρὲς χρυσίον ἀντέδωκεν, 1.26). Although Appian's narrative of the events is clearly biased against the reforms of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus and identifies with the aristocratic view of their land redistributions as betrayals of the principles of the Roman Republic, his emphasis on these atrocities casts doubt both on the legitimacy of their execution and the constitutionality of the acts themselves.

The public locations in which the deaths of the Gracchi take place, in conjunction with the fact that acts of an angry mob are involved, initiate a period during which the deaths of political foes increasingly become a public spectacle in Rome.[22] This is made clear by Appian's narrative of the conflict between Marius and Sulla (1.55–102).[23] As Sulla marches along the Sacred Way into Rome, he performs public executions of his own soldiers who are caught loot-

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20 All translations of excerpts from Appian's *Civil Wars* are cited from McGing 2020.

21 Cf. 1.20, on the refusal of burial rites to Scipio Africanus (and the concealment of the evidence for a possible murder plot against him). See also earlier discussion of the treatment of Pompey's body in Plutarch *Life of Pompey* 80.

22 Cf. 1.32–33, describing the death of Appuleius and his followers by the angry mob. For the 'spectacularization' of necropolitical violence in antiquity, see also Syrkou and Velaoras (pp. 119–120n60) in this volume.

23 On Appian's portrayal of Sulla's dictatorship, see Hose 1994:278–282.

ing property (1.59), an act with powerful symbolic associations, which marks him as protector of the Roman Republic.

But the episode that most vividly captures the dynamic of necropolitical violence in contexts of civil strife is narrated in detail by Appian at the end of his account of Marius and Cinna's triumphal return to Rome (1.70–71). This revolves around the death of the consul Octavius, Cinna's opponent, and his followers: resigned to his death, Octavius refuses to flee and waits for his opponents in full insignia. His heroic stance is juxtaposed to the degradation his dead corpse suffered, on which Appian offers a highly charged commentary:

> ὁ δὲ Κηνσωρῖνος αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐκτεμὼν ἐκόμισεν ἐς Κίνναν, καὶ ἐκρεμάσθη πρὸ τῶν ἐμβόλων ἐν ἀγορᾷ πρώτου τοῦδε ὑπάτου. μετὰ δ᾽ αὐτὸν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀναιρουμένων ἐκρήμναντο αἱ κεφαλαί, καὶ οὐ διέλιπεν ἔτι καὶ τόδε τὸ μύσος, ἀρξάμενόν τε ἀπὸ Ὀκταουίου καὶ ἐς τοὺς ἔπειτα ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἀναιρουμένους περιιόν.
>
> Censorinus cut off his head and carried it to Cinna, and it was hung up in front of the rostra in the Forum, the first head of a consul to receive such treatment. After him the heads of others who were slain were suspended there; and this shocking custom, which began with Octavius, was not discontinued, but was handed down to subsequent massacres.
>
> *Civil Wars* 1.71

Appian's use of the term μύσος is particularly revealing: the term is used in tragedy and other sources in order to denote the most unholy acts of murder (such as patricide or fratricide). The pollution that ensues can only be purged through acts of divine retribution or, alternatively, ritual purification.[24] Appian has already used this term once in his narrative of Rome's civil wars, at the conclusion of his account of the death of Tiberius Gracchus on the Capitoline hill in 1.17. As he notes there, "this abominable crime (μύσος), the first that was perpetrated in the public assembly, was seldom without parallels thereafter from time to time (οὐ διέλιπεν, αἰεί τινος ὁμοίου γιγνομένου παρὰ μέρος)." The treatment of the Gracchi and the acts of Cinna and his faction are thus emphatically aligned within Appian's historical narrative, and the reader is prompted to regard them as the starting points of a long chain of recurrent (and progressively escalating) acts of extreme necropolitical violence.

24 See, e.g., Aeschylus *Libation Bearers* 650, 967; *Eumenides* 445, 839; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 2.53, 4.79.

The choice of the rostra as the place where the severed heads of Cinna's victims are displayed is itself significant. The *rostra vetera* was the curved, raised platform in Rome's forum where orators delivered their public speeches in Republican Rome. Its name derives from the rams of the six ships captured by the Roman general Gaius Maenius after the Roman victory against the Latins at Antium in 338 BCE which decorated it.[25] Situated in the most prominent location of Rome's forum, in close proximity to the temple of Romulus, the rostra was the centre of public life in Republican times. This assured the visibility of the punishment received by the opponents, but also sought to drive home its most sinister associations: displaying the mutilated remains of enemies at the very place where speech was normally practised was tantamount to restricting, if not outright cancelling, any form of vocal opposition or criticism. The practice therefore undermined the very foundations of Roman republicanism.[26]

It is clear enough that Appian's perspective is hostile to the faction of the *populares*, as represented by Marius and Cinna. His emphasis falls both on the novelty of the form of post-mortem defilement that the men in question devised and on the fact that it was only directed against members of the higher echelons of Roman society (consuls and senators), excluding victims of equestrian rank:

> Ζητηταὶ δ᾽ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτίκα ἐξέθεον τούς τε ἀπὸ τῆς βουλῆς καὶ τῶν καλουμένων ἱππέων, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἱππέων ἀναιρουμένων λόγος οὐδεὶς ἔτι μετὰ τὴν ἀναίρεσιν ἐγίγνετο, αἱ δὲ τῶν βουλευτῶν κεφαλαὶ πᾶσαι προυτίθεντο πρὸ τῶν ἐμβόλων. αἰδώς τε θεῶν ἢ νέμεσις ἀνδρῶν ἢ φθόνου φόβος οὐδεὶς ἔτι τοῖς γιγνομένοις ἐπῆν, ἀλλὰ ἐς ἔργα ἀνήμερα καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἔργοις ἐς ὄψεις ἐτρέποντο ἀθεμίστους, κτιννύντες τε ἀνηλεῶς καὶ περιτέμνοντες αὐχένας ἀνδρῶν ἤδη τεθνεώτων καὶ προτιθέντες τὰς συμφορὰς ἐς φόβον ἢ κατάπληξιν ἢ θέαν ἀθέμιστον.
>
> Now the victors sent out spies to search for their enemies of the senatorial and equestrian orders. When any knights were killed, no further attention was paid to them, but all the heads of senators were exposed in front of the rostra. Neither reverence for the gods, nor the indignation of men, nor the fear of odium for their acts existed any longer among them. After committing savage deeds, they turned to godless sights. They killed remorselessly

25 Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 34.11.

26 On the role public spaces play in the establishment and assertion of necropolitical power, see Yanık and Hisarlıoğlu 2019:57–63.

> and severed the necks of men already dead, and they paraded these horrors before the public eye, either to inspire fear and terror, or for a godless spectacle.
>
> *Civil Wars* 1.71

Together, these narratorial observations serve as an insightful commentary on the symbolic connotations of necropolitical violence. By reserving this sort of treatment for the prominent members of society only, the victors showcase their power of upending established social order: the head is not only the upper (and controlling) part of the body but, metaphorically and symbolically, stands for the 'head of state', that is, the ruling class and the seat of power, located in the institutions and offices of Republican Rome and their elected representatives.[27] It is precisely these collective institutions, and the political and social hierarchy that they create, that are targeted during this particular civil conflict, motivated as it was by greed and hunger for personal power. Similarly, by turning the ignominious treatment of political opponents into a spectacle, the victors place themselves above all mandates of the law, human or divine. In turn, the terror that their acts of post-mortem defilement are designed to inspire foreshadows the arrival of an autocratic form of rule based on fear and horror. Appian dwells on the horrific details of this mistreatment of Rome's prominent dead long enough, including several examples (Quintus Ancharius, Marcus Antonius, and other praetors and consuls, 1.73–74), and makes it clear in the narrative of the rest of Book 1 that these acts paved the way for the bloody war of conquest waged by Sulla, followed by his cruel dictatorship (1.75–104).

3 The Escalation of Necropolitical Violence during the Second Triumvirate: The Death of Cicero

Cicero's death is undoubtedly the most famous episode of necropolitical violence in Roman history, not only because of Cicero's intellectual and political prominence in Roman Republican affairs as an orator and philosopher but also because of the public and very graphic manner in which his corpse was mistreated. Roman historians and scholars such as Livy, Asinius Pollio, Cremutius

27 Cf. the metaphor of the 'head of state', used by Catiline in Plutarch *Life of Cicero* 14.6, alluding to the Senate and the people (τούτων εἵς τε τὴν βουλὴν καὶ τὸν δῆμον ᾐνιγμένων ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ). See also Ash 1997:208–210, on the powerful role of this association in Plutarch's *Life of Galba*. Cf. Syrkou in this volume on the differential treatment of victims of necropolitical violence on the basis of social status.

Cordus, Aufidius Bassus, and others dealt extensively with the topic,[28] and the gist of their testimonies is provided by Seneca the Elder, in *Suasoriae* 6 and *Controversiae* 7.2.[29] Seneca's testimony makes it clear that Cicero's death was a popular topic in the declamatory practice of imperial Rome, no doubt in large part because of the high pedestal on which the Latin tradition placed Cicero as an orator and rhetorical theorist. On the other hand, the nostalgia of Republicanism inherent in the topic and the fact that Cicero was a prominent victim of the Second Triumvirate's proscriptions may have made it risky for imperial declaimers to choose it. This could however be averted by underplaying or suppressing Octavian's role and emphasizing Antony's instead.[30]

The basic outline of the events surrounding Cicero's death is as follows: Cicero tried to flee from his enemies to Tusculum, but decided to turn back, either because he could not tolerate the voyage by ship or simply because he was tired of escaping. When his assassins caught up with him, he willingly offered his head to be cut off. His executioners also cut off both his hands (or just one hand), because they wrote against Antony. The remains were brought to Antony, who ordered for them to be displayed in the forum, the place where Cicero performed his activity as a consul and from where he also issued attacks against Antony. His head was positioned between the two hands. It is clear that the pattern of mutilation inflicted on Cicero's dead corpse carries symbolic meaning, his head being the source of his voice and expressiveness as an orator (facial expression playing a key role to oratorical performance) as well as the seat of his intellect, and his hands representing his oratorical efficacy (achieved through vivid gesture, besides words) as well as his literary output as a writer.[31] This story, as we will see, receives various tweaks and embellishments by our authors, each putting the stress on different aspects of its symbolic significance, themselves revealing of the connotations of necropolitical power in the era of the Second Triumvirate.

Appian's fourth book devotes ample space to the proscriptions issued by the Second Triumvirate (4.5–51): he cites the entire decree (4.8–11), allowing its vindictive rationale and false rhetoric to become apparent to the reader. The long list of proscriptions asked for the heads of victims to be brought to the vic-

28 See Wright 2001:436–452 (and 436n3, for a full list of the Latin sources). Also Gowing 1992:157; Gunderson 2003:82–87.

29 See analysis by Gunderson 2003:79–89.

30 Fairweather 1981:83–85; Baraz 2020:17–21. For Cicero's death in *Suasoriae* 6, see the extensive commentary by Feddern 2013. For *Controversiae* 7.2, see discussion by Wright 2001; Gunderson 2003:80–81.

31 Gunderson 2000:74–77.

tors, under promise of a monetary reward, and the heads were displayed in front of the rostra (4.15). Appian acknowledges the similarities between this gruesome and sacrilegious treatment of the dead and the events of the conflict between Marius and Sulla that he himself described in Book 1 (see previous section). But he judges the Second Triumvirate's acts to be far more "noteworthy" (ἐπιφανέστερα) because Octavian participated in them, the same man "who established the government on a safe foundation and left behind him his family and name still holding power to this day" (τὴν ἀρχὴν συστησαμένου τε ἐς ἕδραν ἀσφαλῆ καὶ γένος καὶ ὄνομα τὸ νῦν ἄρχον ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ καταλιπόντος, 4.16). The incongruity between the peaceful legacy and illustrious name Augustus left as emperor and the violent beginnings of his political ascendance is here noted but not commented on further by Appian—except perhaps only obliquely.[32] In subsequent chapters, he provides ample detail on the way these proscriptions took place, emphasizing the central role the orchestrated degradation of the dead played in them: the tribune Salvius was beheaded by soldiers during a feast he held for his friends, and his guests were ordered to carry on feasting next to his mutilated body (4.17). Cicero's execution was the most gruesome (4.20): Appian describes the process as a torture, given it took a long time for his head to be cut off, due to his executioner's inexperience. In addition, the post-mortem defilement of Cicero's corpse reaches unprecedented extremes of horror, and it is particularly telling that Appian (4.20) twice underlines the sharp contrast between the man's ignominious end and his illustrious career as an author, orator, and politician. Not only Cicero's head but also his hand was cut off, the same hand, as Appian notes, that wrote the *Philippics* against Mark Antony. If the public display of Cicero's head aims to denigrate his activity as a consul and orator, the display of his severed hand alongside it also denigrates his career as an author.

Further, Appian remarks that Cicero's head and hand were displayed for such a long time in the forum, that "more came to see this than had listened to him [sc. as an orator]" (καὶ πλείους ὀψόμενοι συνέθεον ἢ ἀκροώμενοι, 4.20). This poignant remark is a perceptive comment on how the exercise of necropolitical violence refashions, in a grossly distorting fashion, historical and cultural memory, confirming that "[n]ecropolitical communication over dead bodies provides political elites with a convenient political order in which national identity and collective memory are constantly being reconstructed."[33] Ultimately, Cicero would be more remembered for his ignominious death than

32 On Octavian's portrayal by Appian, see Hose 1994:321–324.

33 Yanık and Hisarlıoğlu 2019:50–51.

for his illustrious career. Worst of all, Cicero's corpse was the target of private ridicule by his executioners. Antony, Appian informs us, was overjoyed by his death and generously rewarded his executioner. He goes on to add a revealing anecdote:

> λέγεται δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς διαίτης ὁ Ἀντώνιος τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Κικέρωνος θέσθαι πρὸ τῆς τραπέζης, μέχρι κόρον ἔσχε τῆς θέας τοῦ κακοῦ. Ὧδε μὲν δὴ Κικέρων, ἐπί τε λόγοις ἀοίδιμος ἐς ἔτι νῦν ἀνήρ, καὶ ὅτε ἦρχε τὴν ὕπατον ἀρχήν, ἐς τὰ μέγιστα τῇ πατρίδι γεγονὼς χρήσιμος, ἀνῄρητο καὶ ἀνῃρημένος ἐνυβρίζετο·
>
> It is said that even while eating his meals Antony placed Cicero's head in front of the table, until he had his fill of such a dreadful sight. So it was, then, that Cicero was killed and abused after his death, a man famed for his eloquence even today, and one who had rendered the greatest service to his country when he held the office of consul.
>
> *Civil Wars* 4.20

The maltreatment of Cicero's corpse continued beyond the public display of its severed parts, at Antony's private *convivia*. In contrast with the symposiasts, who unwillingly had to endure the presence of Salvius' decapitated corpse at dinner, however (4.17), Antony relishes the spectacle. The head is placed in a prominent position, in front of his table and thus in close proximity to the dishes served at his banquets. Appian's phrase "had his fill" (κόρον ἔσχε), would, in a convivial context such as this, normally denote that Antony had eaten his fill of the dishes served at the dinner table. Instead, it seeks to capture the contentment Antony derived from gazing at the remains of his hated foe, at table none the less. The repugnant spectacle of Cicero's severed head is, metaphorically and paradoxically, a visual feast for Antony, effecting a kind of psychological satiety derived from the knowledge that he has achieved a crushing victory, accompanied by the total humiliation of his opponent. Appian's phrasing thus drives home the point that internecine conflict stirs and brings out primitive, almost cannibalistic instincts. Their detrimental repercussions, as his concluding remark makes clear, extend beyond Cicero himself, seeking to demolish all that Cicero stood for, namely, service and devotion to the public good.[34]

Plutarch, in his *Life of Cicero*, states that Antony and Lepidus alone wanted Cicero's death, seeking to make him the first exemplary victim of their pro-

34 See discussion by Gowing 1992:156–157. On Antony's portrayal by Appian, see Hose 1994: 313–320 (302, with a discussion of his role in the proscriptions).

scriptions. At first, Octavian attempted to save the man, but subsequently he, Antony and Lepidus entered into a pact, whereby each had to relinquish a proscribed individual he cared about (46.3–6). Plutarch's commentary on their mutual agreement is scathing:

> οὕτως ἐξέπεσον ὑπὸ θυμοῦ καὶ λύσσης τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λογισμῶν, μᾶλλον δ' ἀπέδειξαν ὡς οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου θηρίον ἐστὶν ἀγριώτερον ἐξουσίαν πάθει προσλαβόντος.
>
> Thus in a frenzy of rage they lost the capacity to think like human beings, but instead they made it plain that no beast is more savage than man when he has the power to satisfy his passion.
>
> *Life of Cicero* 46.4 (trans. LINTOTT 2013)

Cicero's assassination took place immediately afterwards (47.1–48.5), and, according to Plutarch's account, Cicero's head and both his hands were severed at Antony's sole behest:

> τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν ἀπέκοψαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰς χεῖρας, Ἀντωνίου κελεύσαντος, αἷς τοὺς Φιλιππικοὺς ἔγραψεν. αὐτός τε γὰρ ὁ Κικέρων τοὺς κατ' Ἀντωνίου λόγους Φιλιππικοὺς ἐπέγραψε, καὶ μέχρι νῦν Φιλιππικοὶ καλοῦνται.
>
> On Antony's orders they cut off the head and the hands with which he had written the *Philippics*. Cicero himself entitled the speeches against Antony *Philippics*, and they are called *Philippics* to the present day.
>
> *Life of Cicero* 48.6 (trans. LINTOTT 2013)[35]

The account makes it clear that the cutting off and public display of Cicero's hands is a symbolic act aiming to degrade his authorial identity. The enduring consequences of this violent erasure of Cicero's literary legacy from public memory are apparent from an anecdote that he cites at the end of the *Life*: Augustus saw one of his grandsons holding a book by Cicero "in his hands" (τὸν δὲ βιβλίον ἔχοντα Κικέρωνος ἐν ταῖς χερσίν, 49.5), the emphasis on them unmistakably pointing back to Cicero's own hands. The boy attempted to hide the book,[36] but Augustus picked it up, read it, and reminded the boy that Cicero

35 See also commentary on this section by Magnino 1963:171.

36 On *Life of Cicero* 49.5, see commentary by Magnino 1963:172–173; and Lintott 2013:210: "The anecdote shows that republican values might be a source of suspicion in the period when the boys [sc. Augustus' grandsons] were growing up (ca. 10 BCE onwards)."

was "a man of letters and a lover of his country" (λόγιος ἀνὴρ ὦ παῖ, λόγιος καὶ φιλόπατρις, 49.5). These words of Octavian are not only in line with his earlier portrait as a potential saviour of Cicero, but in fact elevate him to a role whereby he attempts to achieve some restoration of Cicero's memory post mortem.[37]

Plutarch also offers an intriguing psychological reading of the public's reaction to the gruesome spectacle provided by the public display of Cicero's severed head and hands:

> τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν καὶ τὰς χεῖρας ἐκέλευσεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐμβόλων ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος θεῖναι, θέαμα Ῥωμαίοις φρικτόν, οὐ τὸ Κικέρωνος ὁρᾶν πρόσωπον οἰομένοις, ἀλλὰ τῆς Ἀντωνίου ψυχῆς εἰκόνα.
>
> He ordered the head and the hands to be placed on the platform above the Rostra[38]—a spectacle for Romans to shudder at, since they believed that they were looking, not at Cicero's face, but at an image of Antony's soul.
>
> *Life of Cicero* 49.2 (trans. LINTOTT 2013)[39]

Plutarch here casts Roman citizens as readers of signs, assigning symbolic meaning to material reality. Accordingly, they react with horror to the spectacle of Cicero's severed parts (especially his face) because they view it as an "image" (εἰκόνα) or reflection of something deeper and hidden, namely, the internal state of Antony's soul. On their symbolic reading, the remains of Cicero's dismembered body stand for the internal dismemberment of Antony's soul: his inner self is no longer a structured whole, governed by his rational faculties, but a fragmented one, leaving his dark and irrational urges unchecked.[40] This psychological reading neatly dovetails with how Plutarch described the triumvirate's abandonment of all human principles and adoption of beastly attributes, governed as they were by "frenzy and rage" (θυμοῦ καὶ λύσσης) at 48.6.

Plutarch's *Life of Antony* further builds on this association.[41] According to the narrative of this *Life*, Cicero's severed parts were first brought to Antony, who took his fill of gazing them for a long period of time. Only then did he order that they should also be displayed on the rostra at the forum. He did so,

37 Magnino 1963:172–173 interprets the episode as evidence of Octavian's genuine remorse.

38 According to Lintott 2013:210, these were the rostra erected by Julius Caesar.

39 See also Magnino 1963:172.

40 See Duff 1999:72–98; Gill 2006:229–238.

41 The pair *Demetrius–Antony* was published later than the pair *Demosthenes–Cicero*, according to the relative chronology of the *Lives* established by Jones 1966:61–74.

Plutarch observes, "just as though he were putting insult upon the dead, and not rather making a display of his own insolence in good fortune and abuse of power" (καθάπερ εἰς τὸν νεκρὸν ὑβρίζων, οὐχ αὑτὸν ἐνυβρίζοντα τῇ τύχῃ καὶ καταισχύνοντα τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπιδεικνύμενος, 20.4).[42] It is no accident, in this respect, that the theme of cannibalism surfaces in the *Life of Cicero* as well, this time in connection with the fate of Philologus, the 'Lover of Letters'—a freedman of Cicero's brother Quintus who was educated by Cicero himself (48.2). Plutarch tells us that Philologus was the man who betrayed the location of Cicero's litter to the assassins. As punishment for his act, Antony delivered him to Pomponia, Quintus' wife, who "forced him to cut off his flesh bit by bit, roast it, then eat it" (τὰς σάρκας ἀποτέμνοντα τὰς ἑαυτοῦ κατὰ μικρὸν ὀπτᾶν, εἶτ᾽ ἐσθίειν ἠνάγκασεν, 49.3). Although Plutarch considers the authenticity of this anecdote dubious, his choice to include it in Cicero's biography no doubt relies on its heavy symbolic connotations. Philologus' cannibalistic punishment mirrors the nature of his crime: he betrayed the family of his patrons, whose *praenomen* and *nomen* he would have carried as a manumitted slave, and of whose household he continued to be a member.[43] Given the importance of the institutions of patronage and family in the world of Rome, this was tantamount to an act of destroying one's own self. This event points to the consequences of a different form of internal dissolution, that of the Roman state and society as a structured and well-governed whole: civil war results in the release of primitive tendencies in society, which destroy key social institutions (such as family, patronage, friendship) that guarantee social stability and cohesion.

Last but not least, Cassius Dio, too, like Appian and Plutarch, speaks of widespread acts of violence against the dead during the proscriptions in the 47th book of his *Roman History*. As he points out:

> … ἡ πόλις ἅπασα νεκρῶν ἐπληρώθη· πολλοὶ μὲν γὰρ ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς ἔν τε ταῖς ἀγοραῖς καὶ πρὸς τοῖς ἱεροῖς σποράδην ἀπεκτίννυντο, καὶ αἵ τε κεφαλαὶ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα αὖθις ἀνετίθεντο, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ σώματα τὰ μὲν αὐτοῦ τε ἐρριπτεῖτο καὶ ὑπὸ κυνῶν ὀρνίθων τε ἠσθίετο, τὰ δὲ ἐς τὸν ποταμὸν ἐνεβάλλετο.
>
> [T]he whole city was filled with corpses. Many were killed in their houses, many even in the streets and here and there in the fora and around the

42 See commentary on this section by Pelling 1988:167–168.

43 See Wiedemann 1981:3–4, and sources at 45–55; Bradley 2011:241–264; Edmondson 2011: 337–361; MacLean 2018:121–129.

> temples; the heads of the victims were once more set up on the rostra and their bodies either allowed to lie where they were, to be devoured by dogs and birds, or else cast into the river.
>
> CASSIUS DIO *Roman History* 47.3.2 (trans. CARY 1917)

The lengthy comparative examination of Sulla's and the Second Triumvirate's proscriptions that Cassius Dio issues next (47.4) places these acts in a broader frame of political meaning. Where Sulla's proscriptions were motivated by impulsiveness, those of the Second Triumvirate exhibited careful planning; and where Sulla targeted only his enemies and the rich, the Second Triumvirate targeted even close friends and relatives. As a result, the Second Triumvirate's proscriptions opened up a vast theatre of slaughter and torture, driving a deep wedge into Roman society (47.4.2). In Dio's account the blame falls principally on Antony and Lepidus,[44] among whom the former was the cruellest: τάς τε κεφαλάς σφων, εἰ καὶ σιτούμενος ἐτύγχανεν, ἐπεσκόπει καὶ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τῆς τε ἀνοσιωτάτης καὶ τῆς οἰκτροτάτης αὐτῶν ὄψεως ἐνεπίμπλατο 'He always viewed their [sc. his slain enemies'] heads, even if he happened to be eating, and sated himself to the fullest extent on this most unholy and pitiable sight' (47.8.2). The pinnacle of cruelty is reached when he and his wife and active supporter Fulvia maltreat Cicero's corpse:

> ὡς δ' οὖν καὶ ἡ τοῦ Κικέρωνός ποτε ἐκομίσθη σφίσι (φεύγων γὰρ καὶ καταληφθεὶς ἐσφάγη), ὁ μὲν Ἀντώνιος πολλὰ αὐτῷ καὶ δυσχερῆ ἐξονειδίσας ἔπειτ' ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὴν ἐκφανέστερον τῶν ἄλλων ἐν τῷ βήματι προτεθῆναι, ἵν' ὅθεν κατ' αὐτοῦ δημηγορῶν ἠκούετο, ἐνταῦθα μετὰ τῆς χειρὸς τῆς δεξιᾶς, ὥσπερ ἀπετέτμητο, ὁρῷτο· ἡ δὲ δὴ Φουλουία ἔς τε τὰς χεῖρας αὐτὴν πρὶν ἀποκομισθῆναι ἐδέξατο, καὶ ἐμπικραναμένη οἱ καὶ ἐμπτύσασα ἐπί τε τὰ γόνατα ἐπέθηκε, καὶ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς διανοίξασα τήν τε γλῶσσαν ἐξείλκυσε καὶ ταῖς βελόναις αἷς ἐς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐχρῆτο κατεκέντησε, πολλὰ ἅμα καὶ μιαρὰ προσεπισκώπτουσα.
>
> When, however, the head of Cicero also was brought to them one day (he had been overtaken and slain in flight), Antony uttered many bitter reproaches against it and then ordered it to be exposed on the rostra more prominently than the rest, in order that it might be seen in the very place

44 See 47.7: Dio acknowledges that some of the responsibility falls on Octavian as well, if only because he was the third member of the Triumvirate (albeit still very young, without enemies and not by nature cruel, as he hastens to point out). On Dio's portrayal of Octavian, see Kemezis 2014:120–139; Madsen 2019:259–281; Markov 2019:282–298; Madsen 2020:82–88.

> where Cicero had so often been heard declaiming against him, together with his right hand, just as it had been cut off. And Fulvia took the head into her hands before it was removed, and after abusing it spitefully and spitting upon it, set it on her knees, opened the mouth, and pulled out the tongue, which she pierced with the pins that she used for her hair, at the same time uttering many brutal jests.
>
> CASSIUS DIO *Roman History* 47.8.3–4 (trans. CARY 1917)

In contrast to Plutarch and Appian, Dio's emphasis falls on the treatment of Cicero's head, the source of the orator's eloquence and vocal opposition to Antony. Publicly displayed, mocked, and spat upon, it suffers the most degrading treatment in the hands of Fulvia herself, who goes so far as to draw out the tongue and pierce it with her hairpins. Fulvia's active involvement in the outrage against Cicero's body, which is attested by no other source except Dio, is a flourish that seeks, perhaps, to cast additional negative light on Antony's character, as well as foreshadow the active role she will play in 48.1–15, assisting Antony in his struggle for predominance against Octavian.[45] Nevertheless, she herself ultimately became the victim of both men's ruthlessness: as Dio notes, after she died, Octavian and Antony did not hesitate to besmirch her memory when it became politically expedient to them, laying the blame for their conflict on her (48.28.2–3).[46]

It is quite clear that, in the accounts of Roman Republican history that these three imperial Greek authors offer, Cicero's death is a powerfully symbolic event. The different details that they focus on, and the different embellishments that they add to the story, serve to illustrate that the undignified treatment of the orator's body was a brutal assault against the very foundations of the Roman Republican state, namely, the practice of public speech, the exercise of (oral or written) criticism, and the idea of service for the public good. Cicero's horrific treatment showcases the perils of civil war and *stasis*, as well as making it clear, particularly through the negative portrait of Antony, that unshackled individual ambition has always been the root cause of power abuse in the world of Roman politics. On the other hand, like their Roman counterparts, the Greek historians carefully edit the story, adopting the 'official' version of Antony being the principal culprit behind the horrendous mutilation of the dead that took place during the proscriptions. Appian and Cassius Dio

45 See also discussion by Gowing 1992:154–156.

46 See also Plutarch *Life of Antony* 30.

do assign some degree of responsibility to Octavian as well but are reluctant to acknowledge this as a black spot in his later immaculate record as *princeps*.

4 Conclusions

As Bargu states, "[t]he production of some bodies as violable after death renders necropolitical violence as a means of the exclusionary construction of citizenship and its 'others', a construction articulated through the divide between loyal subjects and treacherous subjects."[47] As we saw in the course of this discussion, this function of necropolitical violence is most vivid in the accounts of Plutarch, Appian, and Cassius Dio. Their readers are urged to reflect on the detrimental consequences of civil conflict and division in the Republican context in which such vile acts were perpetrated, but also beyond it. The re-appearance of necropolitical violence during the so-called 'Year of the Four Emperors' (68–69 CE), as vividly narrated in Plutarch's biographies of Galba and Otho,[48] serves as a stark reminder that the Roman Empire itself, for all the remarkable stability that it has achieved, is not immune to such dangers, but can itself lapse into violence and anarchy. At the same time, these episodes show that internecine conflicts played a role in the establishment of Rome's imperial power as much as external warfare.

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47 Bargu 2016.

48 See Ash 1997.

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CHAPTER 9

Forms of Necropolitical Violence in Antiquity

Angeliki Syrkou

1 Introduction

The ultimate expression of sovereign power before the mid-seventeenth century CE was, according to Michel Foucault, the right to decide the life and death of the subjects (a privilege probably deriving from the ancient *patria potestas*).[1] Anyone who reacted to the dictates of sovereign power or broke the law, for example, was liable to being eliminated. Thus, "the power of life and death was not an absolute privilege: it was conditioned by the defence of the sovereign, and his own survival."[2] Neither were the lives and deaths of the subjects absolute rights: they "become rights," Foucault explains, "only as a result of the will of the sovereign."[3] Paradoxically, however, "the very essence of the right to life and death is in fact the right to kill":[4] "the effect of sovereign power on life is exercised only when the sovereign can kill."[5]

Another privilege of sovereign power was the right to decide the methods of rehabilitation and punishment of offenders and, in the case of capital punishment, the method of execution. In the Greek world from the 6th century BCE to the 6th century CE, social control and the construction of citizens appropriate for the preservation of the dominant ideology were sought through the public expression of disapproval, public humiliation, torture, and deprivation of rights—even the right of burial. These methods were used by the sovereign, combined with institutionalized penalties.[6] To enforce state law and maintain discipline and order in society, torture and humiliation were systematically deployed. Torture and humiliation could be considered worse than death itself, since they humiliated and degraded the victim as a human being and discredited him as a citizen. The impact on, and the consequences for, the offender were even worse when, additionally, his dignity and his family's honour were

1 This chapter revisits Syrkou 2021 through the concept of necropolitics.
2 Foucault 1978:135. On *patria potestas* see also Agamben 1998:87–90.
3 Foucault 2003:240.
4 Foucault 2003:240.
5 Foucault 2003:240.
6 Bosnakis 2020:48–49.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_010

tainted in the eyes of the public, since the authority did not only use public torture but displayed its aftermath too: the grotesque sight of the abused bodies or the corpses—particularly of those who challenged its sovereignty—warned against subversive actions which could incur torture.

Late Antiquity (3rd to 6th century CE) in particular was not different in that respect—despite the establishment of Christianity. The Christian doctrine promulgated such virtues as charity, solidarity, compassion, and equality. These virtues remained mainly theoretical, however, and had little influence on legal thinking and, notably, human attitudes. So, sentences imposed by state authority still regularly included cruel tortures for the punishment of offenders. As in earlier times, some of them aimed not only at the victims' death but also at defaming and dishonouring them. In this period, new apparatuses were used to facilitate the same purpose, indicatively crucifixion and death on the *furca*, i.e. a fork-shaped instrument of torture, which evolved from the tortures of *apotympanismos* (death on the plank) and *anaskolopismos* (impalement)—common practices in Classical Antiquity (5th to 4th century BCE). The sovereign using these tortures caused the physical elimination of the perpetrator or the opponent.

However, as I will argue in this chapter, there was societal racism in the choice of the methods of rehabilitation, punishment, and the execution of the condemned to death. Racism, as Foucault argues, was inscribed in the mechanisms of the State with the emergence of biopower as "a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die." By designating the latter as the enemy of the former, racism could "justify the murderous function of the State." But this "murder," Foucault specifies, could also be "every form of indirect murder," including "political death, expulsion, rejection and so on."[7] Although Foucault refers primarily to scientific racism, as modern necropolitical practices show, the break introduced by racism could equally be into the socio-economic continuum.[8]

As it will be explained below, torture and some forms of capital punishment in antiquity were inflicted mainly on weaker social groups, low-class people, and slaves. These people, who occupied the lowest rungs of the social ladder, were publicly punished with such tortures that not only hurt their bodies but also humiliated their dignity; it was both physical and psychological. It is also important to note that social racism also pervaded the way historians narrated the martyrdoms, which betrayed not only their own beliefs, attitudes,

7 Foucault 2003:254–256.

8 On racism and necropolitics, see also Mbembe 2019:38 and 70–72.

and experiences but also societal preconceptions. For example, Eusebius (260–339 CE) claimed that the persecution of upper-class Christians was more noteworthy (ἐξαιρέτως … θαυμασιώτεροι) than that of low-class Christians because of the difference in their status, even when the upper-class victims were not subjected to the tortures inflicted on the lower-class ones.[9]

In this chapter I will discuss the impact of tortures on the human body not only on the physical but also on the symbolic level and I will pay special attention to the practice of post-mortem punishment. I will then explore the array of instruments and methods of torture and/or execution used between Classical Antiquity and the early Byzantine era on people of, mainly, low social standing. My basic argument is that the maltreatment of these people as well as the selection of the instruments and methods employed was based on prejudice and considerations of social status rather than the severity of their crime.

2 Torture and the Human Body

In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault describes public torture and execution in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France as a ceremony and a public spectacle and defines torture as a more or less painful corporal punishment of law offenders. He explains that torture associated the type of bodily strike, the quality, the intensity, and the duration of the pain with the gravity of the crime *and the social position of the victim*.[10] Torture was a way to extract the confession of a truth, which had to be spontaneously repeated by the accused in front of the judges.

However, torture was equally intended to make everyone feel the power of the authority, which was represented on the scene of the torture by the executioner.[11] Mutilated and tortured bodies were, still are, a source of rhetorical power. Therefore, regimes caused pain to, and/or abused, the bodies to impose their power and stabilize the systems of their ideological belief. The connection between sovereignty and the fear of pain and death is made explicit by Hobbes, who notes that human beings are naturally terrorized by them. So "it is the fear of pain and death that forces the subjects to yield certain freedoms and power to the sovereign, in return for civil peace."[12]

9 Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 8.9.4–8; Juliussen-Stevenson 2016:113.
10 Foucault 1977:33–34.
11 Foucault 1977:39, 49–50, 53.
12 Stepputat 2014:12.

In the ancient Greek World, as said earlier, torture was imposed either as a punishment to lawbreakers or as a way of extracting information or a confession from the detainees[13]—the method of suppressing crime, unlike in Modern times, was reward and exemplification. Descriptions of torture methods and instruments are rare in ancient texts and works of art, although torture was not infrequent in ancient Athens. Metics and slaves were ordinarily submitted to torture in order to disclose information.[14] In fact, the Athenians did not regard slaves as human beings but as property. Aristotle is clear on that point:

> τίς μὲν οὖν ἡ φύσις τοῦ δούλου καὶ τίς ἡ δύναμις, ἐκ τούτων δῆλον· ὁ γὰρ μὴ αὑτοῦ φύσει ἀλλ᾽ ἄλλου ἄνθρωπος ὤν, οὗτος φύσει δοῦλός ἐστιν, ἄλλου δ᾽ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος ὃς ἂν κτῆμα ᾖ ἄνθρωπος ὤν, κτῆμα δὲ ὄργανον πρακτικὸν καὶ χωριστόν.
>
> These considerations therefore make clear the nature of the slave and his essential quality: one who is a human being belonging by nature not to himself but to another is by nature a slave, and a person is a human being belonging to another if being a man he is an article of property, and an article of property is an instrument for action separable from its owner.
>
> *Politics* 1254a13–17 (trans. RACKHAM)

Demosthenes' views about the bodies of slaves and free men are equally indicative of the perceptions of the ancient world:

> τοῦτο μέγιστον ἂν εὕροιτε, ὅτι τοῖς μὲν δούλοις τὸ σῶμα τῶν ἀδικημάτων ἁπάντων ὑπεύθυνόν ἐστιν, τοῖς δ᾽ ἐλευθέροις ὕστατον τοῦτο προσήκει κολάζειν.
>
> you will find that the biggest difference is that the body of a slave is made responsible for all his misdeeds, whereas corporal punishment is the last penalty to inflict on a free man.
>
> 24.167 (trans. VINCE)

For Demosthenes, it is clear that corporal punishment should be distributed differentially.

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13 Herodotus 7.146; 8.110.

14 Lysias 13.27, 59 and Antiphon *On the murder of Herodes* 49–50.

Torture was not only a means of punishment but often preceded or accompanied the death sentence as well. Its purpose was to inflict pain by causing maximum damage to the human body. Instruments of torture included sharp instruments, the rack, rope, red-hot metal plates, metal 'claws', fire, stones, chains, and handcuffs. The methods of torture and the instruments were almost identical in many areas of the ancient world and hardly changed in time. In the first Christian centuries, during the persecutions against the Christians, the number of torture incidents increased. Christians, in contrast to those accused of violating the law, were cruelly tortured and executed for confessing the *nomen christianum*, refusing to worship Roman gods, or defending their principles. Since they refused to obey the Roman authorities, they were suspected of anti-social behaviour and condemned to a 'bare existence' instead of enjoying full civic rights. However, neither the establishment of Christianity nor the memory of the cruel persecution of Christians put an end to torture. Instead, the Orthodox Church adopted it against heretics, who threatened the integrity of its doctrine and the unity of the faithful.[15]

The blood gushing from the tortured bodies was the visual evidence of the maltreatment of the human body and the great pain caused to it. It thus became an important element with high symbolic value in the mechanisms of power. The pain inflicted on the victim was felt on his skin and below it, beyond the surface of the body, internally and deeply. Not only in Hippocratic medicine, which supplied the model of the humoral body, but in ordinary experience as well the body was perceived in its physicality; it was understood as flesh and blood, susceptible to pleasure and pain and at the same time subjected, vulnerable to illness and death. However, the body was equally the bearer of a person's individual and social identity: a person was his or her body; the body and the self were identical. The self was located in the body and the body participated in a variety of social relations and networks.

Besides, the human body was a surface upon which power relations were inscribed. The male body, free or enslaved, determined the social self and his social position. It formed man's identity.[16] Papyrus P.Oxy. IX 1186 contains part of an early-fourth-century edict of Aurelius Herodes, *praeses* of the Thebaid, issued against the use of the whip in the punishment of free men. The edict suggests that the bodies of free men received a different treatment from those of slaves or those who had been objects of violence—a violence which I consider necropolitical.

15 Syrkou 2021:37.

16 Montserrat 1998:153–163.

> Αὐρήλιος Ἡρώδης ὁ διασημότατος ἡγούμενος
> Θηβαΐδος λέγει· τὸ τὴν διὰ τῶν ἱμάντων λη-
> ταρι[.]ων ἐπιχωρίως οὕτω καλουμένων αἰκεί-
> ̣αν ὑπομένειν ἐστὶν μὲν καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν δουλι-
> κὴν τύχην εἰληχότων ἀνιαρόν, οὐ μὴν κατὰ
> τὸ παντελὲς ἀπηγορευμένον, ἐλευθέρους δὲ
> ἄνδρας τοιαύτην ὕβριν ὑπομένειν οὔτε τοῖς
> [νόμοις] ἀκόλ[ου]θον ἀδικείαν τε [ἔ]χον ἐστὶν ἐ̣ν̣
> [-ca.33-].̣ατε
>
> Edict of Aurelius Herodes, most honourable *praeses* of the Thebaid. Subjection to the punishment of scourging, called in the native speech …, is even for those of servile estate lamentable though not entirely forbidden; but for free men to be submitted to such an outrage is contrary to the laws and an injustice …
>
> P.Oxy. IX 1186 (trans. HUNT)

The instruments of punishment left visible marks of the violence to remind the observers of the great power of the lawgiver and the unendurable pain experienced by the condemned. Papyri with detailed descriptions of beaten bodies can clearly prove the vulnerability of the male body. These wounded and beaten bodies were, in a way, deprived of their masculinity and the standards that accompanied it.[17] The human body was treated as an object, a pledge, or an asset, the value of which varied according to its sex, age, health condition, skills, and social status.[18] This differential treatment obtained even in the case of dead bodies.

3 Punishing the Dead Body, Maltreating the Punished Body

As Banu Bargu has argued, necropolitical violence as an act of mistreatment of the dead body was aimed at the direct punishment of the dead and what they represented, as in the case of Christians. At the same time, it aimed at the indirect punishment of the living.[19] Post-mortem punishment was a common practice in the ancient world, as in modern times, through which the victor confirmed his victory, his power, and his authority.

17 P.Oxy. XLIV 3195 (331 CE), P.Oxy. VI 983 = SB III 6003 (316 CE).

18 Syrkou 2021:26.

19 Bargu 2016. On the maltreatment of dead bodies see also Karakantza and Velaoras (Chapter 6) in this volume.

Starting from Ancient Greece, Herodotus offers us abundant examples: in Book 3, he reports the case of Polycrates, the sixth-century tyrant of Samos, who was cruelly killed by the Persian satrap Oroetes and was then suspended.[20] In Book 4, he describes how the Taurians sacrificed the Greek captives to the Virgin goddess. After the first rites of sacrifice, they struck the victims on their head with a club. Then, they fixed the heads on poles and threw the bodies off the cliff on which the goddess's temple stood. The enemies' heads were placed on very long poles standing high above the people's dwellings.[21] Another case reported in Book 6 refers to Histiaeus, whose headless body was impaled by Artaphrenes and Harpagus while his embalmed head was sent to king Darius at Susa.[22] Necropolitical violence was also exercised by the Persians: Xerxes ordered the impalement of Leonidas' head,[23] while Mardonius wanted to impose the same post-mortem punishment after the battle at Plataea.[24]

Besides constituting eloquent statements of power, the mistreatment of the (dead) body could also reveal preconceptions about its relative social value. Galen had no qualms about using the bodies of crucified robbers in common view on a hill to study human anatomy.[25] Similarly, Celsus declared that "[it is not], as most people say, cruel that in the execution of criminals,

20 Herodotus 3.125.3–4.

21 Herodotus 4.103.1–2.

22 Herodotus 6.30.

23 Herodotus 7.238.

24 Herodotus 4.103.1–2; Cook 2014:219. Similar cases of necropolitical violence are also known from Modern Greek history. During the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), supporters of the Left were deprived of their civil rights and became 'outlaws'. In June 1945 Aris Velouchiotis (member of the Communist Party of Greece as well as the most prominent leader and chief instigator of the Greek People's Liberation Army and the military branch of the National Liberation Front, the major resistance organization in occupied Greece from 1942 to 1945) and his comrade Tzavellas were beheaded by a battalion of the State Forces who had found them dead. The heads of Velouchiotis and Tzavellas were taken to Trikala, where they were hung on a lamppost in the middle of the central square. By hanging the heads of their opponents (one of them being their most important leader), the winners glorified the magnitude of their victory and increased their prestige while, at the same time, they wished to intimidate the followers of the punished (Charitopoulos 2001:570–571).

25 Galen *On Anatomical Procedures* 2.385.17: τῶν τε γὰρ ἐπὶ θανάτῳ κατακριθέντων καὶ θηρίοις παραβληθέντων ἐθεάσαντο πολλοὶ πολλάκις ἐν τοῖς σώμασιν ὅπερ ἐβουλήθησαν ἑκάστοτε διὰ ταχέων, ἐπί τε λῃστῶν ἐν ὄρει κειμένων ἀτάφων 'for men have often rapidly observed whatever they wished in bodies of men condemned to death and thrown to wild beasts, or in brigands lying unburied on a hillside' (trans. Singer); Hengel 1977:77; Bubb 2022:287–288.

and but a few of them, we should seek remedies for innocent people of all future ages."[26] The Byzantines, continuing a Hellenistic practice, used prisoners as test animals for medical research. Theophanes the Confessor recounts how, during the reign of Constantine V, in 764–765 CE, agents went to Bulgaria to kidnap a Christian apostate, whom they transferred to Constantinople. There they cut off his hands and feet and called the doctors, who dissected him while he was still alive (ζῶντα) with a scalpel from the genitals to the breastbone "in order to understand the construction of man" (πρὸς τὸ κατανοῆσαι τὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατασκευήν).[27] The human body had lost its symbolic value.

4 Different Tortures for Different Lawbreakers

The instruments and methods of torture invented and used to inflict great pain on criminals and execute death row inmates were selected on the basis of the perpetrator's social status. In the ancient Greek world, the kind of punishment was different for slaves and free citizens. According to a late-third-century BCE inscription from Delos:

> ἐάν τις ἁλί[σ]κηται τούτ[ων τι] / ποιῶν, ... τὴν δὲ βουλὴν τὸμ μὲν δοῦλον μαστιγοῦν ἐν τῶι κύφων[ι] / πλ[ηγα]ῖς πεντήκοντα, τὸν δὲ ἐλεύθ[ε]ρον ζημιοῦν δραχμαῖς [δ]έκα.
>
> If someone is caught committing one of these acts, ... the *Boulē* 'council' shall have the slave flogged with fifty lashes on the pillory while the free citizen shall be fined 10 drachmas.
>
> SEG 23:498 (my translation)

Flogging was the proper way of punishing slaves and metics while a fine was appropriate for free citizens.[28]

Similarly, the Roman legal system explicitly distinguished between two different forms of death penalty on the basis of social class: the so-called *summa supplicia*, implacable and cruel forms of death which involved burning the condemned alive, crucifixion, and exposure to wild animals; and *capite puniri*, that is death by decapitation. The former was reserved for the lower classes, the

26 Celsus *On Medicine*, Prooemium 26 (trans. Spencer).

27 Theophanes *Chronography* 436.10–20; cf. Celsus *On Medicine*, Prooemium 23–26.

28 Geltner 2014:41–42.

humiliores, who were executed in public spectacles in the arena; the latter for the more respectable *honestiores*, and it usually meant beheading performed either by sword or by axe.[29] The upper class would thus be subjected to more humane punishment, at least in terms of the accompanying shame and humiliation. The martyrs' naked and tortured bodies, on the other hand, were displayed to the Roman public and the spectators were expressing their rejection and despite. For the spectators, the victims were outcasts, rebels, or criminals convicted of atrocities.

Below, I shall concentrate on those instruments and methods that were selectively used between Classical Antiquity and the early Byzantine era to punish the despised and devalued people, arguing that there was a continuum in the means and methods of punishment across the centuries. I shall distinguish between two categories of torture methods and instruments: the first comprised methods and instruments used for the punishment of lower-class people only; the second, which was occasionally used for the punishment of higher-class people as well, had the additional, but not less important, intention to degrade and humiliate the victims.

4.1 *Methods and Instruments of Torture*

Hand and foot cuffs were used to immobilize the victims inside and outside prison during torture. Some of these people died and were buried along with the means of their torture, which were brought to light in many archaeological fieldworks in Greece. Many collective burials contained, among other findings, cuffs, handcuffs, chains, and fetters, an indication that these dead people had been tortured. For instance, the excavations at the Kaiadas Cave by archaeologist P. Themelis in 1983 brought to light bones of men, women, and a child thrown together with stones. Some of the deceased were found chained, while a bronze arrowhead was nailed to the skull of one of them. These people, who had been brutally tortured and thrown into the cave either alive or soon after their death, were probably the defeated Messenian rebels of 464–459 BCE.[30] In ancient Akanthos, some of the dead bodies excavated, dated to the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BCE, wore cuffs on their feet and hands and a metal collar round their neck.[31] It can be surmised that the differ-

29 Garsney 1970:124; Clark 2004:39–41; Christides, Høgel and Monferrer-Sala 2012:103 and n310. Although beheading is the punishment imposed on the upper social class, there is the odd exception: οἱ μὲν Ἀλεξανδρεῖς ἐξεβλήθησαν, οἱ δὲ δοῦλοι αὐτῶν ἀπεκεφαλίσθησαν 'the Alexandrians were cast out; their slaves beheaded' (*Acts of the Alexandrinians* 9b.1.8–9).

30 Ninou 2017:38; Themelis 1982:183–200.

31 Bosnakis 2020:142–148.

ent method of burial of some people from what was the norm is an indication that these people had in some way been deliberately rejected by their societies for some wrongdoing.[32] The dead in Akanthos were most probably imprisoned convicts, according to Bosnakis.[33] Others were considered deviant, dangerous, or unacceptable by society and for this reason they were punished by way of deviant burial,[34] like the seventy dead people, probably invaders, in the Lete (Derveni) second-century BCE tomb; many bones of these dead people bear strong traces of maltreatment and violence, such as distinctive cuts from sharp instruments, perhaps axes.[35]

Cuffs were also used on slaves, especially disobedient ones. In a cemetery of ancient Pydna dated in the 4th century BCE, four of the dead men were tied in various parts of the body, such as the neck, arms, and legs. The macroscopic osteological analysis of 58 of the 115 skeletons excavated suggests that they most probably belonged to slaves.[36] A vivid description by Diodorus suggests that cuffs were used to control slaves working in mines under unbearable conditions:

> οἱ δ᾽ οὖν ταῖς ἐργασίαις τῶν μετάλλων ἐνδιατρίβοντες τοῖς μὲν κυρίοις ἀπίστους τοῖς πλήθεσι προσόδους περιποιοῦσιν, αὐτοὶ δὲ κατὰ γῆς ἐν τοῖς ὀρύγμασι καὶ καθ᾽ ἡμέραν καὶ νύκτα καταξαινόμενοι τὰ σώματα, πολλοὶ μὲν ἀποθνήσκουσι διὰ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς κακοπαθείας· ἄνεσις γὰρ ἢ παῦλα τῶν ἔργων οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ [ταῖς] τῶν ἐπιστατῶν πληγαῖς ἀναγκαζόντων ὑπομένειν τὴν δεινότητα τῶν κακῶν ἀτυχῶς προΐενται τὸ ζῆν, τινὲς δὲ ταῖς δυνάμεσι τῶν σωμάτων καὶ ταῖς τῶν ψυχῶν καρτερίαις ὑπομένοντες πολυχρόνιον ἔχουσι τὴν ταλαιπωρίαν.
>
> But to continue with the mines, the slaves who are engaged in the working of them produce for their masters revenues in sum defying belief, but they themselves wear out their bodies both by day and by night in the digging under the earth, dying in large numbers because of their exceptional hardships they endure. For no respite or pause is granted them in their labours, but compelled beneath blows of the overseers to endure the severity of their plight, they throw away their lives in this wretched

32 Tsaliki 2008:13.
33 Bosnakis 2020:103–104.
34 See Bosnakis in this volume.
35 Bosnakis 2020:103–106.
36 Bosnakis 2020:142–148.

> manner, although certain of them who can endure it, by virtue of their bodily strength and their persevering souls, suffer such hardships over a long period.
>
> *Historical Library* 5.38.1 (trans. OLDFATHER)

Finally, the lower frieze of the tombstone of Amphipolis (1st century BCE or CE) records the practice of slaves being transported by chains.[37]

Besides the cuffs and chains, the **strap** (μαγκλάβιον),[38] the **whip** (χαρζάνιον), and the **staff** (ῥάβδος), were the most common means of corporal punishment and torture. Whipping or flogging was a sentence on its own, but it also often accompanied other sentences or preceded the death sentence.[39] It was employed during the interrogation process and also as a means of public humiliation of the victim. As indicated by the inscription from Delos quoted earlier (SEG 23:498), lower-class persons and slaves would be flogged for crimes for which members of the upper-class would be punished by fines.[40] Flogging thus determined, and was in accordance with, people's social status: flogging a free man meant that he was regarded as inferior and that he was relegated from his status group.

A petition of the 2nd century CE preserved on papyrus confirms that in Egypt flogging was only appropriate for slaves, not for free citizens: ἐλευθέρους τύπτειν καὶ παίειν καὶ μαστιγοῦν ὡς δο[ύλο]υς 'to beat and give a thrashing and to flog the free-born *like slaves*'.[41] Similarly, the aforementioned edict of Aurelius Herodes, *praeses* of the Thebaid, deprecated, but eventually allowed, whipping for slaves.[42] Finally, for the torture of Christians, the Romans exploited methods and instruments used for slaves,[43] for example, whips ending in metal tips

37 Finley 1968:169.

38 Pseudo-Codinus *On Offices* 181.30: κρέμανται δὲ ἐπὶ ζώνης ἑκάστου τούτων λῶροι, οὓς καλοῦσι μαγκλάβια, μαστίζειν τοὺς ἀξίους μαστίζεσθαι 'Straps, called *manglavia* [whips], to whip those who deserve to be whipped, are suspended from the belt of each of them' (trans. Macrides, Munitiz, and Angelov).

39 John Malalas *Chronography* 491.16; John of Damascus *Encomium of Saint Barbara* 96.808 PG.

40 Tetlow 2005:228. Lashing was the corporal punishment sanctioned by the Byzantine law: the emperors Theodosius and Justinian sanctioned flogging, for instance against pimps (*Novels* 18 [536 CE] and 14 [535 CE] respectively), as an alternative sentence for culprits unable to pay their fine (*Theodosian Codex* 9.19.6), and as a regular penalty (*Pandects* 48.19.7; 28.8; 1.2).

41 P.Wisc. I 33.20 (147 CE); trans. Bryen 2013—my emphasis.

42 P.Oxy. IX 1186.2–4 (4th century CE).

43 Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.34.

that cut the martyrs' flesh and bones.[44] When the political and economic differences and demographic base of Rome broadened after the edict of Caracalla (212 CE), the social gap among citizens narrowed. Flogging, however, remained a licit form of punishment only for foreigners, slaves, and children.[45]

Arguably, all methods of torture violated the personal rights of the victim; however, some methods of torture aimed, it seems, at adding the humiliation of the victim to his or her physical punishment. Punishment that caused physical pain was not sufficient in itself but was supplemented by the degradation of what we may call the victim's 'soul', 'mind', and 'personality'. Such a category of tortures, which includes suspension and long-term exposure of the victim's body, had been used for centuries in order to inflict a humiliating death on the offender, to blemish his reputation with methodical stripping of his dignity, to ridicule him, and, finally, to deprive him of the ultimate right of burial.[46] "The absence of a funeral," Bosnakis explains, "abolished the human status of the deceased, and, in combination with the erasure of the culprit's memory from the public landscape, constituted for the perpetrator the most abhorrent exemplary humiliation in the community."[47] These tortures, which were used by the sovereign to cause the physical death of the perpetrator or the opponent, e.g. Christians, include ***apotympanismos*** **(death on the plank),** ***anaskolopismos*** **(impalement), crucifixion**, and **death on the** ***furca***, which were carried out in a similar way and shared more or less the same rationale.

Apotympanismos, an old and well-known method of torture and execution in Classical Athens (5th to 4th century BCE), was the established punishment for pirates, seafaring men, thieves, robbers, and traitors.[48] The Athenians condemned to death on the plank Menestratus, who was sentenced as

44 Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 8.10.4. Palladius *Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom* 10.

45 For the Sovereign, foreigners, non-free members of society, people with different cultural morals and dissident political ideas were considered deviants; Geltner 2014:44–45.

46 In the ancient Greek world, as Archaic epic and Classical dramatic poetry show, apart from some exceptions (like, for example, the case of Achilles who does not want to return the body of Hector for burial or the case of Polyneices, whose burial is forbidden by Creon altogether) the dead must be buried, regardless of their actions, their origin and ideology. Burial is established by the gods, so any deviation violates divine or natural laws and pollutes the community; Karakantza 2022:208.

47 Bosnakis 2020:190.

48 Keramopoullos 1923:45n5; Lysias 13.68; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.2.62; [Aristotle] *Athenian Constitution* 52.1.

an actual murderer, having driven to death many well-known Athenian citizens while the Athenian democracy was overthrown (in 404 BCE). Agoratus' eldest brother, who was caught in Sicily for treachery after making signals to the enemy, was executed on the plank on Lamachus' order. In the middle of the 4th century, the Athenians also condemned to death on the plank those who had promised Philip their cooperation.[49] *Apotympanismos* was carried out on a wooden board, called τύμπανον or τύπανον,[50] in a conspicuous place outside a city.[51] Herodotus mentions that after the siege of Sestus (479 BCE), the Athenians executed the Persian governor Artayctes, who had been charged with religious offences, by nailing him alive on boards and then suspending him.

> Ἀθηναῖοι Ἀρταΰκτην ἄνδρα Πέρσην λαβόντες Σηστοῦ ὕπαρχον ζώοντα πρὸς σανίδα διεπασσάλευσαν, ὃς καὶ ἐς τοῦ Πρωτεσίλεω τὸ ἱρὸν ἐς Ἐλαιοῦντα ἀγινεόμενος γυναῖκας ἀθέμιστα ἔρδεσκε.
>
> The Athenians captured a Persian called Artayctes, the governor of Sestus, and nailed him alive to a plank of wood, because he used to have women brought to him in the sanctuary of Protesilaus in Elaeus and commit sacrilege with them.
>
> 7.33.1 (trans. WATERFIELD)[52]

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49 See respectively, Lysias 13.57: λαβόντες ἐν δικαστηρίῳ ὡς ἀνδροφόνον ὄντα, θάνατον δικαίως καταψηφισάμενοι τῷ δημίῳ παρέδοτε καὶ ἀπετυμπανίσθη 'you long afterwards had him before you in court as actual murderer and justly condemned him to death; you handed him over to the executioner, and he suffered death on the plank' and also 13.67: ληφθεὶς ὑπὸ Λαμάχου ἀπετυμπανίσθη 'by Lamachus' order he was executed on the plank' (trans. Lamb). Demosthenes 19.137: τοὺς τότε ταῦτα πρὸς αὐτὸν εἰπόντας παραχρῆμα, ὡς δεῦρ᾽ ἐπανῆλθον, ἀποτετυμπανισμένους 'the persons who talked like that to him had been cudgelled to death immediately after their return home' (trans. Vince and Vince); Demosthenes 8.61. Cf. Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 28.2.

50 The term means a musical instrument and a cosh, a lethal instrument used for the execution of the condemned; see Photius *Lexicon* T 610 s.v. 'τύμπανον'. The terms ἀποτυμπανίζω and ἀποτυμπανισμός have a semantic variety which often makes it difficult to distinguish which of the three tortures is being meant each time. See ἀποτυμπανίζω in the most authoritative dictionaries of Greek: "beat to death, beat, behead, put to death in any cruel and violent manner" (Lampe 1991); "to beat to death, to kill, to destroy" (Montanari 2015); "crucify on a plank, generally destroy" (LSJ); "kill or execute by pole; flog or beat but not to death" (Adrados and Gangutia Elícegui 1980–2019); see also the noun ἀποτυμπανισμός: "destruction" (Montanari 2015); "crucifixion" (LSJ).

51 Keramopoullos 1923:29–30; Modrzejewski 2011:317–338.

52 See also Herodotus 9.120.4.

A detailed description of its application is given by Douris of Samos who recounts how the Samians had been executed by the Athenians in Miletus: after quashing the anti-Athenian rebellion in 440 BCE, Pericles had the ten leaders fastened to planks on the main square for ten days, after which they were beaten with wooden clubs on their heads and left to die deprived of their right to burial, an act of sheer necropolitical violence, following Bargu:[53]

> Δοῦρις δ᾽ ὁ Σάμιος τούτοις ἐπιτραγῳδεῖ πολλὴν ὠμότητα τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ τοῦ Περικλέους κατηγορῶν, … ὡς ἄρα τοὺς τριηράρχους καὶ τοὺς ἐπιβάτας τῶν Σαμίων εἰς τὴν Μιλησίων ἀγορὰν καταγαγὼν καὶ σανίσι προσδήσας ἐφ᾽ ἡμέρας δέκα κακῶς ἤδη διακειμένους προσέταξεν ἀνελεῖν, ξύλοις τὰς κεφαλὰς συγκόψαντας, εἶτα προβαλεῖν ἀκήδευτα τὰ σώματα.
>
> To these details Douris the Samian adds stuff for tragedy, accusing the Athenians and Pericles of great brutality … that Pericles had the Samian trierarchs and marines brought into the market-place of Miletus and crucified there, and that then, when they had already suffered grievously for ten days, he gave orders to break their heads in with clubs and make an end of them, and then cast their bodies forth without burial rites.
>
> PLUTARCH *Life of Pericles* 28.1–2 (trans. PERRIN).

The Samian trierarchs and marines were crucified not as ordinary enemies but as traitors, Samos being a member of the Delian League revolting against Athens.[54] Efimia Karakantza suggests that Sophocles, who had followed Pericles to Samos as a general, might have witnessed the atrocity of the Athenians against the Samians' leaders and that this experience might have played its part in the creation of his *Antigone*.[55] In fact, she continues, the Athenians must occasionally have witnessed similar executions in Athens as well and this can be confirmed by such archaeological findings as those of 1915 in Phaleron. Archaeologist A. Keramopoullos proved that the seventeen men buried in irons collectively in Phaleron had been executed by *apotympanismos*.[56]

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53 Bargu 2016.

54 Osborne 2015:274; Athenians were aware of similar practices: "a traitor, or somebody who is equated to a traitor, is executed and not allowed burial; if he is already dead at the time of the trial for treason, his body is not allowed burial either" (Karakantza 2022:213).

55 Lewis 1988:35–50; Karakantza 2022:213.

56 Keramopoullos 1923:11 and 15. Recent excavations (2012–2017) next to the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Centre, currently still under investigation, have yielded more evidence for cases of maltreated bodies; see Bosnakis in this volume.

Anaskolopismos seems to have been the impalement of the condemned on a pole, which brought about a quick death,[57] contrary to crucifixion which caused a slow death over a period of up to ten days.[58] **Crucifixion**, a variant of *apotympanismos*, was a widespread and extreme penalty of death in which the instrument of torture was either a broad wooden board or a couple of wooden beams. While the ancient texts quite often mention crucifixion, it is the archaeological findings, although limited, that illuminate and reveal the brutality of executioners: a still unpublished excavation in Rhodes in 1987 brought to light a collective burial of about twenty-nine people, whose wrists and shins were pierced by nails.[59] This burial, dated in the first years of the 1st century CE, and the ossuary of the crucified Jewish man Yehohanan from Palestine, dated to the late twenties CE, offer a realistic picture of the torture, which is also supported by the earliest surviving images. The first, the Palatine Graffito, bears the inscription: Ἀλεξάμενος σέβεται θεόν 'Alexamenos worships (his) god' and depicts a crucified figure with the head of a donkey with its outstretched arms and feet nailed.[60] The second, the crucifixion graffito of Alkimilla from Puteoli, is a valuable piece of evidence regarding the place of crucifixion in popular culture. It is engraved on the wall of a taberna excavated at Puteoli, and it depicts a crucified woman, Alkimilla, whose ankles are attached on either side of the vertical pole. The marks on her body reveal that she had been beaten.[61]

One of the rare descriptions of crucifixion in literary texts is given by Pseudo-Manetho (2nd to 3rd century CE), who enumerates the criminals who deserved crucifixion and offers a dramatic description of their position.[62] A detailed realistic description of the torture is offered by Dionysius of Halicarnassus:

> ἀνὴρ Ῥωμαῖος οὐκ ἀφανὴς θεράποντα ἴδιον ἐπὶ τιμωρίᾳ θανάτου παραδοὺς τοῖς ὁμοδούλοις ἄγειν, ἵνα δὴ περιφανὴς ἡ τιμωρία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου γένηται, δι᾽ ἀγορᾶς αὐτὸν ἐκέλευσε μαστιγούμενον ἕλκειν καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλος ἦν τῆς πόλεως τόπος ἐπιφανὴς ἡγούμενον τῆς πομπῆς, ἣν ἔστελλε τῷ θεῷ κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνον τὸν καιρὸν ἡ πόλις. οἱ δ᾽ ἄγοντες τὸν θεράποντα ἐπὶ τὴν τιμωρίαν τὰς χεῖρας ἀποτείναν-

57 A variety of terms denote impalement: ἀνασταυρῶ, ἀνασκολοπίζω, προσπασσαλεύω, προσηλῶ, καθηλῶ, κρεμῶ, ἀνακρεμάννυμι, προσαρτῶ, ἀναρτῶ. The most frequent one seems to have been the verb ἀνασκολοπίζω 'to fit on a pole or stake'.

58 Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 28.1–2.

59 Bosnakis 2020:170–171.

60 Welborn 2012:1–11. For McLean 2002:208 and n. 34, the crucified figure is probably a mock representation of Christ or of Anubis, the jackal-headed god of Egypt.

61 Guarducci 1971:219–223, plate 23b.

62 Pseudo-Manetho *Apotelesmatica* 4.197–200.

> τες ἀμφοτέρας καὶ ξύλῳ προσδήσαντες παρὰ τὰ στέρνα τε καὶ τοὺς ὤμους καὶ μέχρι τῶν καρπῶν διήκοντι παρηκολούθουν ξαίνοντες μάστιξι γυμνὸν ὄντα.
>
> A Roman citizen of no obscure station, having ordered one of his slaves to be put to death, delivered him to his fellow-slaves to be led away, and in order that his punishment might be witnessed by all, directed them to drag him through the Forum and every other conspicuous part of the city as they whipped him, and that they should go ahead of the procession which the Romans were at that time conducting in honour of the god. The men ordered to lead the slave to his punishment, having stretched out both his arms and fasten them to a piece of wood which extended across his breast and shoulders as far as his wrists, followed him, tearing his naked body with whips.
>
> *The Roman Antiquities* 7.69.1–2 (trans. CARY)[63]

Undoubtedly, crucifixion was a horrific and cruel manner of capital punishment imposed on a variety of individuals including slaves, men and women, foreigners, and citizens of low social class. As it is made clear by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the condemned, who had been tortured before execution, were often forced to walk in chains to the place of their crucifixion and to carry the *patibulum* (i.e. the horizontal beam of the cross). Its public character added to this method of execution even more pain, not only physical but also moral: the choice of public, prominent places for crucifixion—which became a landmark of social memory—indicates that the desired goal, whether it was for deterrence purposes, public entertainment, or both, could easily be achieved.[64] The public character of crucifixion harmed the hopeless and powerless victims on the cross variously since their loved ones witnessed their execution without being able to help them. Thus, the cross became a symbol of bodily suffering for people,[65] as the curse *in cruce figaris* 'may you be nailed on the cross', preserved in a Latin inscription, reveals.[66] This form of punishment was frequently used by rulers to control the population of the territory and maintain the social and political order by causing extreme pain, degrading the victim's personality, mainly that of low-class individuals, and debasing their human dignity and nature. Consequently, crucifixion was used as a political tool for the maintenance of social order, against the threat of the worst criminals or rebels.

63 See also Artemidorus Daldianus *Oneirocritica* 2.53; Plato *Gorgias* 473c.
64 Shi 2008:41.
65 Shi 2008:52.
66 CIL IV 2082.

The fact that a mutilated corpse was also liable to crucifixion, as in the case of Achaeus, whose headless body was crucified, reinforces the idea that crucifixion was meant to degrade and humiliate the offenders:

> ἔδοξε δ᾽ οὖν πρῶτον μὲν ἀκρωτηριάσαι τὸν ταλαίπωρον, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποτεμόντας αὐτοῦ καὶ καταρράψαντας εἰς ὄνειον ἀσκὸν ἀνασταυρῶσαι τὸ σῶμα.
>
> And it was decided to lop off in the first place the unhappy prince's extremities, and then, after cutting off his head and sewing it up in an ass's skin, to impale his body.
>
> POLYBIUS *Histories* 8.21.3 (trans. PATON)

Thus, crucifixion equalled in the eyes of the social elite absolute degradation and shame.

When Constantine the Great abolished execution by crucifixion in his effort to prevent the inevitable association of the punishment of offenders on the cross with the death of Christ,[67] the *furca* substituted for the cross. The *furca*, an instrument of punishment which had the form of a Y or a V, was not necessarily fatal.[68] Evidence for the use of *furca* even in the 6th century CE is provided by Theophanes, who recounted the execution of three men that had participated in the Nika riot, and by John Malalas.[69]

Rounding out the survey of methods of torture and execution applied to low-class people, we should not omit to mention **hanging**, which was counted among the most impious and humiliating ways of death.[70] Hanging is rarely recorded in ancient sources. However, the verb κρεμαννύναι, which is used by writers to refer to it, can also be used in cases of crucifixion. Therefore, it is often difficult to specify the exact form of torture.[71]

Apotympanismos (death on the plank), *anaskolopismos* (impalement), crucifixion, death on the *furca* and hanging share some common features which

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67 Sozomen *Ecclesiastical History* 1.8.13.

68 According to *Suda* Φ 628, "among the Romans" the φοῦρκα meant "a two-pronged timber" (παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις δίδυμον ξύλον) while in *Etymologicum Gudianum* I 276 ἰκρύον is defined as "a cross, a two-pronged timber, the gallows, on which criminals were hanged" (σταυρός, φοῦρκα, ξύλον, ἐν ᾧ οἱ κακοῦργοι κρέμανται) (my translations). The verb φουρκίζω or φουλκίζω means death in many ways: hang, drop someone of a cliff, impale; Cook 2014:37.

69 Theophanes *Chronography* 184.4–6; John Malalas *Chronography* 473.13.

70 *Pandects* 48.19.28.

71 Aristotle *Politics* 1311b; P.Cair. Zen. II 59202 (254 BCE); Plutarch *Life of Themistocles* 22.2; Arrian *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.14.4 (but cf. Plutarch *Life of Alexander* 72.2).

confirm that they were all used not only to inflict death, which many other methods did as well, but mostly to humiliate and degrade the victims. That was achieved in many ways:

First, the victim's body was fully exposed and, in the case of crucifixion, it was exposed naked so that the shame of nudity accompanied the other tortures imposed on the victim and deprived him of human dignity.[72] The involuntary nakedness also underscored the offender's weakness and the total loss of his power. Moreover, the victim was mocked by the crowd, mainly in the case of crucifixion and, in particular, while he was carrying his 'cross'.[73] According to some sources, Jesus was forced to wear a purple cloth. If that information is accurate, it can be inferred that the soldiers aimed to mock him or even sexually assault him.[74]

Second, the long-lasting physical pain, which was a basic element of these modes of execution (with the exception of *anaskolopismos*, which caused a quick death), and the public display of the maltreated body, also affected the victims' dignity and that of their families.

Third, the victim was usually left unburied, to be eaten by wild animals.[75] Burial, with the appropriate customs and rituals, was significant in ancient culture, and indicative of social rank, honour, and public identity.[76] Although the official legal statute suggests that criminals' corpses could be returned to relatives, this was unlikely for those executed in one of the four ways discussed.[77] Thus, the victim became the embodiment of shame and indignity.

Fourth, *apotympanismos*, impalement and crucifixion—on the cross or the *furca*—were considered the appropriate sentences for the most hateful and dangerous persons, persons with no social esteem, that is slaves, captives, prisoners, revolutionaries, and rioters.

Fifth, these forms of execution turned the offender into a deterrent example for the rest of the community; the corpse becomes "an object of horror and dread," not only because of the process of decomposition but also because "when a man dies, society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken

72 Shi 2008:46.

73 Conway 2008:131.

74 Even in the 19th century the convicted were distinguished by their "infamous dress" (Foucault 1977:8). Trexler 1995:34 also believes that dressing a male victim in bright clothing might also have been a prelude to sexual assault.

75 Juvenal *Satires* 14.77; Horace *Epistles* 1.16.46–48; sometimes Judeans were allowed to bury the corpses of crucified relatives (Philo *Against Flaccus* 82–85).

76 Shi 2008:49.

77 *Pandects* 48.24.1.

in the very principle of its life, in the faith it has in itself," according to Hertz.[78] At the same time, the bad reputation and dishonour afflicted the victim's family and marked his descendants. Thus, the stigma of disgrace and social rejection was the price for the broader family.

Finally, the total elimination of the victim was achieved, since humiliation and degradation harmed the victim psychologically; these forms of torture might be considered as the precursor of modern psychological torture.

Consequently, the public character of the execution was not a judicial but a political ritual by which the authority reconfirmed itself. It humiliated, degraded, and debased the offenders' human dignity and nature with the purpose of restoring the balance and declaring the gap between the subjects who had violated the law and the powerful authority, which displayed its power in this way.[79] Eventually, by creating fear and insecurity in the living the authority managed to subjugate them to the power of the dead.

5 Conclusion

As has been explained in this chapter, the choice of torture depended on social criteria. Moreover, lower-class people (more rarely the higher class too) were subjected to a punishment that affected not only their bodies but also their dignity and social status. This distinction aimed, through the social discredit and trivialization that were part of their punishment, to control and fixate the masses, making them harmless to the authorities. The exercise of sovereignty was thus achieved through the control of mortality, the maintenance of dignity, and the determination of the social position of the citizen and his descendants. Punishment of lawbreakers was sought through the use of violence and torture because the sovereign could thus demonstrate his power against the powerless citizens whose body was tortured and whose dignity was humiliated. The fear of the long-lasting physical pain and torture that included suspension and long-term exposure affected the body and personality of the victims; the belittling of the other family members and their social exclusion as well as the deprivation of burial were the means by which social control was carried out. The offenders had to be punished in an exemplary and cruel way even post mortem.

78 Stepputat 2014:12; Hertz 1960:37 and 78.

79 Foucault 1977:45 and 48–49.

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PART 4

Necropolitics in Classical Reception

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CHAPTER 10

A Necropolitics of Posthuman Bodies? Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Lobster* (2015) and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017)

Benjamin Eldon Stevens

1 Humanisms Classical, Modern, De-, Re-, and Post-; or, towards an Ancient *anarchéologie* of Modern 'Bodies'

In this chapter, I consider a question that follows on the historical emergence of 'necropolitics' in the context of 'posthumanism'.[1] Posthumanism reveals how claims about 'human nature' are ideological and often anti-historical: going further than postmodern/ist explodings of simple unified 'subjectivity', posthumanist thinking draws critical-historical attention to cultural constructions of 'the human' including 'the [sc. (normative) human] body'.[2] In this context, if necropolitics has been framed as furthering 'biopolitics', then something is, as it were, buried there: for the opposite of bio- or 'life-politics' is '*death*-politics', i.e. *thanato*-politics.[3] Emphasis on *necro*-politics may therefore be read as seeking the critical-historical return of something that is often repressed—namely, the *nekros* or 'dead body'. From this perspective, necropolitical study reveals how the definition of '(a) life' is a matter of cultural construction and, so, of value-judgement. When is a body—when is somebody—meaningfully 'dead'?[4]

To start considering that question in this chapter, I focus on examples of classical reception—itself a freighted encounter with something no longer 'living'—in a genre devoted to what is dead but will not stay gone: supernat-

1 An earlier version of this study was presented at the Conference in Classics and Ancient History, University of Coimbra, 22–25 June 2021. I am grateful to Efimia Karakantza, Alexandros Velaoras, and Marion Meyer for including my talk and for inviting me to develop it into this chapter. In thinking about Lanthimos's films, I learned much from the students in "Ancient Worlds in Film and Television" and "Classics and Science Fiction," both spring 2021 at Trinity University, and from my wife, Jenny Catchings.

2 On posthumanism, esp. Hayles 1999; Haraway 1991; for application to Classics, see below, n. 13.

3 Esp. Agamben 1998 after Foucault 2004; Agamben 2000; Mbembe 2019 and 2003, with Butler 2002; applied to Classics, foundationally Weiner 2015; cf. Weiner and Benz 2018.

4 Cf. Cruz 2012: "In the field of biology, which is the study of life, what is the place of 'un-death'? How, indeed, can the term be defined?"; and Carroll 1981.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004718432_011

ural horror.[5] Of all modern genres, horror seems most deeply committed to representing the body as a site of political signification, often in context of contested engagement with the past.[6] Horror—supernatural and otherwise—has thus been productively studied from bio-, thanato-, and necropolitical perspectives.[7] This may be linked to scholarship on classical receptions in related genres: if science fiction and fantasy may be read as 'knowledge fictions', with longstanding themes of punishment for Promethean inquiry, then horror even more clearly includes '*forbidden*-knowledge fiction'.[8]

Frequently the forbidden, including forbidden knowledge, has taken symbolic form as 'monstrosity', whether in monsters as such, with bodies marked as non-normative, or in monstrous action including violence that is considered somehow unacceptable. I do not mean that there is 'acceptable violence'; rather that a culture makes its own distinctions between acceptable and not. Indeed, that is precisely what monsters in horror 'de-monst(e)r-ate': the secret history of modernity's dependence on systems of violence done to (others') bodies, or in other words on hidden structures of 'precarity' and 'bare life'.[9] As Jerome Cohen has suggested in his foundational theorization of monstrosity, then, "we live in a time of monsters."[10] Cohen's dictum is echoed by Slavoj

5 For classical reception as 'haunting', esp. Uden 2020 on the Gothic, after Hogle 2012; cf. Richardson 2016 and Susanetti 2016. On receptions in horror and related genres: e.g. Unrue 1995; Pitcher 2013; Weiner 2015a; Krämer 2017; chapters in Weiner, Stevens, and Rogers 2018; Fletcher 2019; Stevens 2022 and 2023. For horror themes in antiquity: Felton 1998; Lowe 2015; Doroszewska 2017; Anderson 2019:67–73.

6 Horror as 'body genre': esp. Brophy 1986; Creed 1986; Williams 1991; Clover 1993; Tudor 1995; Sobchack 2004; and cf. Halberstam 1995, esp. 71–74; much follows Kristeva 1982 on 'the abject'. For 'the body in pain', Scarry 1987.

7 E.g. Kelly 2017 on David Robert Mitchell's 2014 *It Follows* depicting 'precarity' in light of 2008's economic downturn, reflected in Lanthimos's 2009 *Dogtooth* (and Tom Six's 2009 *The Human Centipede*, below, Section 6); Fiddler 2017 on Michael Haneke's 1997/2007 *Funny Games* literalizing the violence that underpins the suburban and/or bourgeois household; Hahner, Varda, and Wilson 2013 on *Paranormal Activity* mobilizing surveillance technologies and tropes of *mise en scène* to figure consumer(ist) abjection (with Dauphinee 2007).

8 On classically receptive science fiction as 'knowledge fiction', Rogers and Stevens 2012:130–139, advancing the term (from Theodore Sturgeon) on p. 135 with some history in n. 18; Rogers and Stevens 2015:11–20; cf. Weiner 2015a; Syson 2017. For modern horror in relation to systems of knowledge, Colavito 2007:12: horror is "a genre tied uniquely to a single source of ultimate horror, the very act of knowing."

9 As Kelly 2017:237 summarizes, horror "transgresses society's elaborate symbolic defence mechanisms that are designed to insulate us against knowledge of [sc. our] own mortality"; cf. Becker 1997.

10 Cohen 1996b:vii; cf. 1996a.

Žižek, who offers "now is the time of monsters" as a translation for the final phrase of Antonio Gramsci's summation of modernity as crisis: "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, morbid symptoms of the most varied kind come to pass."[11]

'Monster' as 'morbid symptom' in modernity as sickened body may return us, finally, to classical receptions, insofar as Gramsci's 'old' and 'new' may be defined with reference to ideas about 'antiquity'. As if anticipating the political import of monster theory, folklorist Vladimir Propp argued that the hybrid monsters of ancient myth reflected social upheaval, arising "out of the clash of two ages or of two systems and their ideologies" and therefore embodying "unresolved contradictions."[12] From this perspective, 'antiquity' is identifiable as a rich source and site for monstrosity—precisely and paradoxically in relation to how ancient worlds are imagined as providing the monster's notional opposite, 'the human'.

In other words, if 'classical antiquity' has been a recurrent point of reference for 'modernity', but if modernity has been exposed as dehumanizing, then what happens to received ideas about 'classical humanism'?[13] In particular, when we acknowledge that the discipline of Classics arose in context of other modern cultural imaginaries and power-structures including European colonialism and imperialism, could a necropolitics of ancient worlds help *re*-humanize the modern—or productively *non*-humanize it, differently *person*-alizing it?[14] If so, horror's contribution includes putting actual bodies, in all their diversity and vulnerability, before the idealized being: a proleptic posthumanism, confirming that this world is already a 'world without us', at least until 'us' is not limited to 'the [sc. classical] human'.[15] Classical receptions in horror may then be read as unearthing secret histories of modern(ity as) sovereignty: a kind of Foucauldian *archéologie* as politically progressive *anarchéologie*, in which antiquity as irrepressible dead thing helps to make clear how 'our' modern life is necropolitical, i.e. made possible by 'others'' lives defined as living deaths.

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11 Žižek 2012:43; Gramsci 1996:32–33.

12 Propp 1984:11–12. For receptions of classical monsters, Liveley 2008; Gloyn 2020; Stevens, Weiner, and Rogers 2024.

13 Esp. Bianchi, Brill, and Holmes 2019; Chesi and Spiegel 2020.

14 Esp. Said 1978; cf. Rossi-Reder 2002. Speculative fiction involving classical receptions has played a role: thus colleagues and I have argued that Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's formative *Frankenstein* "interrogat[es] ancient discourses in ways that speak to ongoing concerns about politics and society in the global twenty-first century" (Weiner, Rogers, and Stevens 2018:13); cf. Stevens 2022.

15 After Weisman 2008; cf. Horkheimer and Adorno 2002:35–62. See below, Section 6.

To start exploring that possibility, in this chapter I focus on two films by the Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos that offer critical (satirical) depictions of modernity in part via classical receptions. First is *The Lobster* (2015, henceforth *Lobster*), evoking Sophoclean tragedy, especially that of Oedipus, to expose the profound deathliness of the superficially life-affirming genre of romantic comedy. By pandering images of personal fulfilment through consumerism, romantic comedy would make palatable the underpinnings of the modern *polis*, whose ideology of choice conceals an economy of bodily exchanges and constraints. Second is *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017, henceforth *Deer*), recalling the myth of Iphigenia at Aulis as in Euripides' play via ritualized sacrifice of 'innocence'. Framed as inevitable *nemesis* for unwitting *hubris*, such a sacrifice reveals that the modern *oikos* is not a 'safe house' but another (dis)place for the violence required by the state. The films thus centre a posthumanist necropolitics in the 'unresolved contradictions' among systems of understanding—defining, (de)valuing, and variously disposing of—'the body'. Contrary to the claims of ostensibly 'technical' or 'scientific' disciplines like matchmaking and medicine, bodies are not simply either 'living' or 'dead' but sites of complex overlap and remainder. By preserving traces of violence in particular, bodies reveal the arbitrariness of cultural value-judgments between 'lives' that are thought 'worth living' and others marked for '(living) death'.

… a situation which, as we shall see, Lanthimos seems to find very funny.

2 *The Lobster*: Oedipus is an Animal at Speed-Dating; or, *polis* as "Transformation Room"

Part of *Lobster*'s engagement with antiquity seems evident in its iconic final scene: David (Colin Farrell) is about to blind himself by gouging his eyes out with a knife, echoing Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[16]

But if Oedipan in this regard, the moment and with it the story may not be Sophoclean. First, the act itself is left aporetic: the last we see of David, he is still knife in hand, and so we do not know whether he blinds himself or not. The film at this moment might thus do classical tragedy one better, refusing not only to show violence in the diegesis but even to determine if it occurs. The question is crucial for ancient tragedy as for biopolitical modernity: is there

16 A bit of film history might be factored in, since Farrell had played a similarly costumed role in Steven Spielberg's 2002 *Minority Report*, which also thematizes eyesight in Oedipan ways (with Bakewell 2008); cf. Winkler 2008.

FIGURE 1 David in almost-Oedipal moment
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE LOBSTER*, 2015. FRAME CAPTURE. © SONY PICTURES RELEASING INTERNATIONAL

'a history of violence', and therefore grounds for *nemesis* or, more positively, reconciliation?[17]

This complication runs deep, since the potential blinding is also motivated differently: David wishes to 'match' the object of his desire, Rachel Weisz, whose (nameless) character has been surgically blinded. Although we could say that David has reached this point through a kind of learning, he has not obviously learned, like Oedipus, about his own unwitting participation in tragedy; stretching, we could argue that his earlier would-be relationship with a sociopath (Angeliki Papoulia) recalls Oedipus' with Jocasta, insofar as it involves a killing within the family: the sociopath kills David's brother, who—evidently having failed to find a partner—had been transformed into a Border Collie. The film hides the act of killing but then shows the dog's mangled corpse, as if recalling how classical tragedy tended not to show violence on stage.[18]

A deeper tragedy, however, attends the would-be romantic 'matching' that forms the through line of the film: in the film's depiction of society, romantic coupling is permitted only if the two people share an evident similarity. Thus,

17 Cf. David Cronenberg's 2005 *A History of Violence*.

18 Sophocles' *Ajax* might show a death on stage; see Kornarou 2008, with Pathmanathan 1965. See below, Section 5, for an explicit scene of killing involving a non-human animal body. Not all Oedipan films are so restrained: e.g. in Tony D'Aquino's 2019 film *The Furies*, a woman who has witnessed violent killings removes one of her eyes with a knife.

FIGURE 2 Entrance to the "Transformation Room"
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE LOBSTER*, 2015. FRAME CAPTURE. © SONY PICTURES RELEASING INTERNATIONAL

for example, another character (Ben Whishaw) fakes nose-bleeds to partner with a real nose-bleeder (Jessica Barden). This absurdist set-up is the ironclad rule: anyone who fails to find a superficially similar partner before a certain age is changed into an animal, in a "Transformation Room."

David has thus specified that, should he fail to find a partner, he will become a lobster, arguing pathetically that "lobsters mate for life." His dilemma in the final scene is therefore properly 'tragic' insofar as he has no good option: fail and be transformed into a non-human animal; or, in order to partner with Weisz's character, match her (wholly unwilled) blindness by blinding himself. Of course, choosing one's manner of execution does not alter the fact of getting killed, nor can that illusion of choice make up for the fact that accepting systemic violence to bodies is what makes one 'human'.

By contrast, then, failure at the zero-sum game of romantic comedy marks one as non-human, as essentially animal only awaiting that physical form. Thus, *Lobster*'s category of 'loners'—who revolt from normative society by refusing to take part in matchmaking—are hunted in the woods by the would-be daters, armed with rifles shooting tranquilizer darts. With the seemingly middle-class aspirants thus aping the old noble pursuit of 'most dangerous game', *Lobster* sets its sights on modern psychologizing that limits personhood to sexual desire that must be performable in middlebrow consumerist forms. Consumers become willing executioners by proxy of systems that only seem to make 'the good life' possible by outsourcing labour, that is, by doing viol-

ence elsewhere to people whose dehumanized status means that their lives may be treated as 'living death'.[19] From this perspective, with romantic comedy depending on systemic exploitation of slippage from 'human' to 'animal', the modern *polis*, too, is *Lobster*'s "Transformation Room."

… and yet might the same continuity of forms not contain a destabilizing potential, with human and (other) animal worlds together imagined as "manifold text"?[20] To this possibility we will return.

3 *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*: Iphigeneia in Cincinnati; or, *oikos* as Home Operating Theatre

Classical reception in *Deer* is implicit in the title and manifest in the plot, which turns more directly on the question of 'match' or 'substitute'. Is there any making up—or making sacred, 'sacrificing'—for grievous loss?[21] Insofar as the question cannot, but must, be answered, *Deer*, like *Lobster*, is 'tragedy'. A man has been killed and a surviving relative demands an equivalent death from the killer's family: a teenaged boy named Martin (Barry Keough), whose father died in surgery, tells the surgeon, Steven (Farrell again), that he must choose which of his own family members (wife, daughter, son) will die. As Steven delays, violence is visited on his children, apparently by supernatural means insofar as 'natural science', the set of modern knowledge-systems for enculturating 'nature', offers no answers: the children are paralysed from the waist down, lose their appetites, bleed from the eyes.

In this way they are made in particular to embody what we learn are Steven's own qualities: inaction, chilly perversity, refusal to see. More generally, their bodies are thus *made abject*, unless and until one such abjected being is, paradoxically, *made sacred*, sacrificed: thus, the beings considered most worthless in life, whose lives are the most precarious, are made to seem most valuable only as bodies in violent death.[22]

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19 See further below, n. 22.

20 After Calvino 1988 on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

21 Esp. Butler 2006 on precarity in context of mourning.

22 Cf. Rabinowitz 1993:33–34: "the sacrificial victim is a substitute, enabling the group to exercise *violence without fear of vengeance*; thus, for the sacrifice to be effective, *the victim must be like the community but not identical to it*"; and Bremmer 1983:306–307: in Ancient Greek practice, "the community sacrificed the least valuable members of the polis, who were represented, however, as very valuable persons"; with Girard 1972:8–12.

FIGURE 3 Martin examined by Steven
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE KILLING OF A SACRED DEER*, 2017. FRAME CAPTURE. © HANWAY FILMS

If the story is thus in the tradition of myths like Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, here too classical tragedy is modulated by motive and history of violence in modern society.[23] Steven, a lauded surgeon, is hardly Agamemnon, and any warlike 'cause' is rearguard action against the forces centred around the inexorable Martin. Crucially, Martin himself claims not to know why all this happens: it just does—and yet he plays the role of a knowing antagonist more dangerous when confined, like 'the stranger' in Euripides' *Bacchae* and like several modern 'monsters', perhaps foundationally Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) in Jonathan Demme's 1991 *The Silence of the Lambs*.[24] Indeed, quite like that 'cannibal', who in at least one character's mind may be "some kind of vampire," Martin mouths human flesh: his own; we return to that act of autophagy

23 On Euripides' play in regard to human sacrifice, Rabinowitz 1993:65–105. Variations on the theme in film are many: e.g. Joseph L. Mankiewicz's 1959 adaptation of Tennessee Williams's 1958 play *Suddenly Last Summer* (with Seigel 2005), Nicholas Roeg's 1973 *Don't Look Now*, Sofia Coppola's 1999 adaptation of Jeffrey Eugenides' 1993 novel *The Virgin Suicides*.

24 See esp. Halberstam 1995:161–167. Other recent examples include the Joker (Heath Ledger) in Christopher Nolan's 2008 *The Dark Knight*, Loki (Tom Hiddleston) in Joss Whedon's 2012 *The Avengers*, Ava (Alicia Vikander) in Alex Garland's 2015 *Ex Machina*, and Lena (Natalie Portman) in Garland's 2018 *Annihilation*.

FIGURE 4 Bob afflicted by supernatural medical symptoms
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE KILLING OF A SACRED DEER*, 2017. FRAME CAPTURE. © HANWAY FILMS

below.[25] Here I note that Martin's reflexive action also provides reflection: for of course such strangers-as-monsters show, as if in mirror image, the self's monstrosity. In all these cases, it is a monstrosity of believing oneself not complicit in systemic violence done to others, when in fact the responsibility is intimate. For technically it is not Artemis (Martin-mis?) but Agamemnon who cuts his daughter Iphigeneia's throat, not Dionysus but Agave who cuts off her son Pentheus' head …

This lurking Bacchic aspect of *Deer* shows, too, why such a discipline as medicine must fail to offer knowledge: professing discovery, i.e. revelation through diagnosis, it is rather configured to conceal, obscuring the cultural history of violence done to bodies by classifying it as 'natural' and therefore not open to questions of justice. In that context, a "sacred deer" is a sort of red herring, only seeming an exception while signifying—as symbol, index, and

25 Euripides' *Bacchae* has been detected behind the foundational modern vampire-story, Bram Stoker's 1897 *Dracula*: esp. Colavito 2013, Beal 2002, 128–129 and 215–216n8, with Stevens 2025 on echoes in F.W. Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu* and Ari Aster's 2018 *Hereditary*. Cf. Julia Ducournau's 2016 *Raw* (*Grave*), in which a taste for raw flesh, including human, is congenital in the women of a family—not incidentally, all veterinarians.

icon—how bodies are made (in)to matter: made 'other', they are not subjects but only objects, or abjects, of desire. When the state of exception is the rule, the household becomes an extension of the operating theatre, a banal location for extraordinary rendition, not 'safe house' but 'black site'. On this reading, the *oikos* internalizes the logic of the biopolitical state, i.e. the logic of the slaughterhouse and the camp.[26]

If the surface failure in *Deer* is epistemological, then, with a discipline of 'medicine' not diagnosing illness but discriminating among bodies, the deeper problem of course is ethical: the story's medical doctors, positioned to benefit from displaced violence, all seek to absolve themselves of responsibility for others' lives and complicity in their deaths. Steven and his anaesthesiologist colleague (Bill Camp) thus blame each other for Martin's father's death; and in the central dilemma, Steven refuses to choose which family member to sacrifice, first seeking to outsource responsibility asking the children's school principle which child is "best," then trying to randomize the killing by tying them up, spinning around blindfolded (proleptic Oedipus?), and shooting a rifle in whichever direction he stops.[27] Eventually the latter method results in Steven shooting to death his son, Bob (Sunny Suljic).

… and this farcical killing is staged in the 'living' room. Other spaces, and others' homes, are also sites of abjection and absurdity, as we will see.

4 Animals in the *agora*; or, from the Sacred to the Profane, Mundane, and Absurd

Taking *Lobster*, *Deer*, and their classical receptions together, then, means taking them at their words: all names for animals, words that animals, whose bodies are considered non-human, cannot speak for themselves.[28] Thus there is a "lobster," or there will be, made somehow of human flesh; there was a man identified as "sacred deer," for which an equivalent must be found in further human sacrifice. The horror of course is that all of this is ordinary, indeed ordering: *Lobster*'s science-fictional aspects aside (we do not see the "Transformation Room" in action), and notwithstanding *Deer*'s supernaturalism (Martin simply asserts that this is how it works), the films identify real history. Since the knowledge

26 Slaughterhouse: e.g. Thierman 2010; camp: Agamben 1998:4; cf. e.g. Norris 2000.

27 Evidently some governments and militaries seek to 'diffuse responsibility' in execution by firing squad by requiring some of the rounds to be blanks or (wax) dummies; I am grateful to Jenny Catchings for this observation.

28 See further below, Section 6.

FIGURE 5 Final scene in a diner
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE LOBSTER*, 2015. FRAME CAPTURE. © SONY PICTURES RELEASING INTERNATIONAL

that allegedly separates humans from animals is knowledge of their own mortality, culture works to get its human participants to will their own sacrifice, self-identifying as animals to be slaughtered. On a necropolitical reading, culture's purpose is to insist that the unexamined life, bare life, is indeed worth living.

This is emphasized in Lanthimos by mundanity and absurdity. *Lobster*'s iconic ending, noted above, is set in the diner of a highway truck stop. David and Weisz's character sit in a booth at a window while traffic passes outside, drinking only water and ordering no food—a reflection of how, costumes of normalcy aside, they are not really 'people' in the economy of this *polis*.

Will David do what it takes (as in Figure 1), willing the violence required for his return to 'human rights', including the ability to turn (other [human]) bodies into meat? In fact he has already done so, transforming the sociopath into an unspecified animal in recompense for the loss of his own 'sacred deer', his brother, the Border Collie; and leaving the leader of the loners (Léa Seydoux) bound in an open grave, as if profanely sacrificed as food for wild dogs.[29] Here David is close indeed to Oedipus, who is first marked out by rightly answering a question posed by a human-animal hybrid about which being's body changes

29 A programmatic form of dehumanization in ancient heroic epic: Homer *Iliad* 1.4–5.

FIGURE 6 Final scene in a diner
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE KILLING OF A SACRED DEER*, 2017. FRAME CAPTURE. © HANWAY FILMS

over time—and thus frees a *polis* from pestilence by internalizing it: he is that embodied being, and through him the *oikos* embodies wrongness. Likewise, David, despite ordering no food, rightly asks for a steak knife to use on himself, an ironic indication of his potential ritual sacrifice as *pharmakon*.

Deer's final scene dramatizes similar themes. Steven and (surviving) family, wife Anna (Nicole Kidman) and daughter Kim (Raffey Cassidy), are finishing a meal in a diner, when Martin comes in to eat. Seeing him, they cannot continue eating, having no appetite—at least not for food, since their looks communicate various desires.

Kim in particular will cast a last lingering look at Martin, a reminder that she attempted to save her family by professing love for him and, although made paraplegic, crawling along a road to find him: the ancient sacrificial animal substitute, virginal Iphigeneia, willing action while Agamemnon dithers. Kim's awareness of the real terms of exchange was suggested earlier, when she told Martin, "you have a great body."[30] Martin's body too is thus suggestively marked. In this final scene, visible still are traces of the violence done to him by Steven.

Attempting to free his family without choosing between his children, Steven held Martin captive in his basement and beat him. As noted above, Martin

30 See further below, Section 5.

FIGURE 7 Martin tortured by Steven
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE KILLING OF A SACRED DEER*, 2017. FRAME CAPTURE. © HANWAY FILMS

outdid him by biting out a chunk of his own forearm.[31] Martin is thus 'monstrous' only insofar as he fully accepts and enacts on his own body the premise of culture: bodies are made (in)to matter as objects, and abjects, of desire.

If other diners knew the histories hidden nearby, would they lose their appetites or rather deepen them? In fact they—we—do know: there is no not-knowing, really, what happens to bodies, their transformation into matter for mass-production, consumption, and more. Disciplines and other institutions make only the barest difference to the surface of bare life: bodies are always marked, i.e. inscribed in ways to make their histories of suffering a matter as if for specialists only, the sciences including medicine, the police, and the military, all together hiding the actuality of bodies, their cultural histories and teleologies. Only thus, under cover of life as peaceful consumerism, is there made acceptable an ongoing transformation of living bodies into effectively dead raw material or Heideggerian 'standing-reserve'.

As Judith Halberstam has put it, if bodies should matter (ethically, politically), in modern cultures they only *are* matter (physically)—and horror em-

31 Cf. the moment in *Funny Games* when a home invader uses a remote to rewind the film itself and play the scene differently, with Fiddler 2017:85–86 and 88n5. Home invasion and the home as 'black site', a place for 'enhanced interrogation techniques', recurs: e.g. Bryan Bertino's 2008 *The Strangers*, Denis Villeneuve's 2013 *Prisoners*.

phasizes this by showing how they "splatter."[32] From this perspective, horror's depictions of violent excess and transgression are genre tropes for the difficulty and the stakes of critical historical inquiry. A focus on the body—as in bio-, thanato-, and necropolitical study—helps expose the pervasive modern fantasy of endlessly youthful bodies, a fantasy of disembodiment, as depending in fact on systemic displacement of violence, dispossession of bodily autonomy, and mere distance—not meaningful disappearance—of complicity in others' lived experience of precarity. As in classical tragedy, in modern horror this crisis of the *polis* is mapped onto *oikoi*. Thus, as Robin Wood has argued, horror-filmic households "only carr[y] to its logical conclusion the basic (though unstated) tenet of capitalism, that people have the right to live off other people": a tenet that is horrifically emphasized, not wholly invented, in examples like Wood's, the cannibalistic family of former slaughterhouse workers in Tobe Hooper's 1986 *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*.[33] In context of such bodily category mistakes built into *poleis* that dependent on *bourgeois* consumerism, can there be an argument for changed modes of consumption, e.g. vegetarianism?

… we can thus consider the *Lobster* further below.

5 Secret Histories of Manual(s of) Labour; or, How to 'Camp' under a Highway and Have a Man Over for Dinner

Horror need not be explicit to be horrifying: in context of the cultural politics exposed by necropolitical study, it is destabilizing enough—(sacrificial-)knife-edged enough—to show the after-effects of violence on bodies, i.e. ways of "regarding the pain of others."[34] Since ideologically no/body must have history, history may occur only elsewhere, off-site and farther down the human food chain figured as assembly line. The parallel to outsourced manual labour is emphasized: *Lobster*'s transformations are surgical, accomplished technologically and manually; *Deer*'s Steven is of course a surgeon; and, seeking the history in which she is embroiled, Steven's wife Anna gets Martin's father's medical records by a kind of substitute interaction with the male body, masturbating the anaesthesiologist in a car parked under a highway.

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32 Halberstam 1995:138–160: Chapter "Bodies that Splatter."

33 Wood 1985:214; cf. Halberstam 1995:147: "cannibalism exemplifies the practices associated with the capitalist family."

34 Foundationally Sontag 2003, a theme resumed in her 2004 article in the light of photographs from Abu Ghraib; for application to American film after 9/11, Westwell 2011.

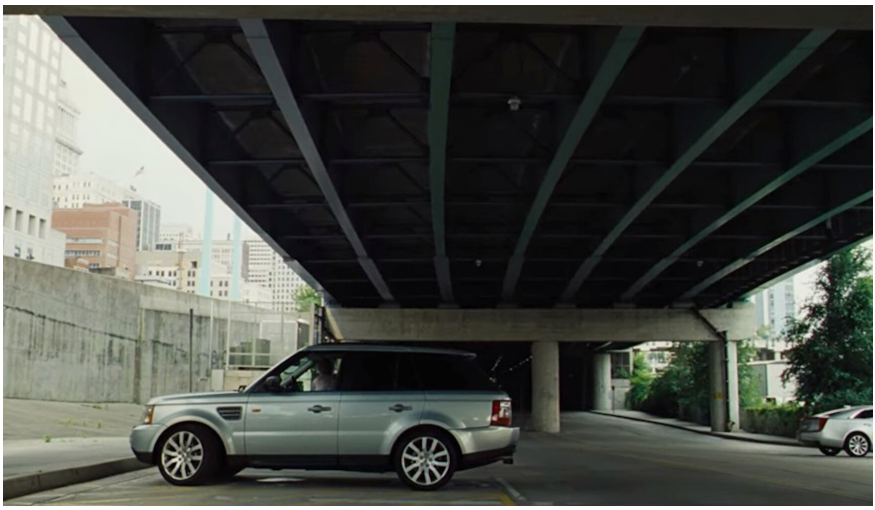

FIGURE 8 A sexual favour in a parked car
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE KILLING OF A SACRED DEER*, 2017. FRAME CAPTURE. © HANWAY FILMS

Like the diners that end both films, the setting is a transitory or interstitial not-place, a *utopia*, emphasizing the dystopic cultural framing for this exchange. The action too is of a piece: if Steven has killed antiseptically, in an operating theatre before the story and outside the diegesis, Anna focalizes 'little death' in and around her body: here she brings the anaesthesiologist to orgasm; earlier, in what is evidently a regular sexual role-play with Steven, she pretends to be unconscious, a set-up they call "general anaesthesia."[35] It is an image of privileged play-acting, suggesting false consciousness about what other, structurally more precarious beings cannot avoid: once more, a woman must will her participation as object, presumably in part for believing that status to be temporary, while the man lives out his fantasy of wielding additional power over bodies made vulnerable on the (bed as) operating table. As symbolic reenactment, this pleasurable play-acting suggests an incomplete acknowledgment of complicity in others' experience of bodily harm and (living) death.

Anna's incomplete or false consciousness seems confirmed in a further conventional filmic sign of discomfiture and transgression, as she smokes cigarettes but only furtively, outside the house. In these ways, she is opposite and

35 The staging recalls the framings of Brigitte Bardot near the beginning of Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 *Contempt* (*Le Mépris*), and of Kidman again in Stanley Kubrick's 1999 *Eyes Wide Shut*.

FIGURE 9 An evening of seduction (?)
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE KILLING OF A SACRED DEER*, 2017. FRAME CAPTURE. © HANWAY FILMS

yet equivalent to Martin's mother (Alicia Silverstone).[36] The surface of Martin's mother's life is perhaps more obviously desperate: we see her only in a single location, her somewhat shabby if neatly kept home suggesting a lower-middle-class existence, where she has prepared for Steven a sadly risible evening of seduction consisting of dinner and dessert.

Substitution in the form of ritual animal sacrifice continues, as appetite for food is supposed to lead to desire for the chef: an overlap she almost names, shouting "You're not leaving until you've had my tart!" She has aimed to model such substitution by taking Steven's "beautiful hands" into her mouth and hoping he finds her body "great," as it has previously been described by her son, Martin, who thereby echoes Kim's description of *his* body. If not quite Oedipal, the algebra comes close. Martin's mother is therefore different from Anna only in circumstance, i.e. in history—and since history is forbidden to precarious bodies, awareness of the difference is discomfiting: a kind of 'tragic recognition' (*anagnorisis*), if farcical, of complicity in histories of violence done to others.

36 Perhaps a film-historical joke: both Kidman and Silverstone have played opposite Batmen, the former as psychologist Dr. Chase Meridian in Joel Schumacher's 1995 *Batman Forever*, the latter as superhero Batgirl in his 1997 *Batman and Robin*. Coincidentally, Farrell appears in Matt Reeves's 2022 *The Batman* as Penguin, another evocation of cultural value-judgments about 'human' and 'animal/ity'.

6 *Au Hasard Lanthimos*? or, Closing Remarks on *The Lobster*'s 'Opening Shot'

But for Lanthimos, finally, such lasting harm also seems like *laughing* harm, for—as in the Aristophanic pun on 'tart'—the films are intended to be funny. That can be discomfiting indeed: when *Deer* played at Cannes, it was booed by the jury—perhaps expressing their own tragic recognition that the most horrific genre of all is 'romantic comedy'. For 'camp' reveals the logic of the camp. This is evident from the beginning, when *Lobster*, as if anticipating the awkward dinner scene in *Deer*, opens with a visual pun: a woman is driving her car, stops, gets out, and with a handgun shoots and kills a donkey: literally an 'opening shot'.

From later in the film, learning that those who fail at romance or refuse it are transformed into animals, we may speculate that the donkey was once human—a man?—and did something in the woman's eyes to deserve this execution. But if we watch the film for a reason, that is in vain, for again there must be none: any mundane animal body, any/body, must have no history, or else 'life' could not justly be limited to only those bodies considered 'classically human'. For if every body were allowed its history, then 'our' vital sacredness would be impossible to make depend on 'their'—others'—violent sacrifice: like monsters that de-monst(e)-rate too much, bodies with unbidden histories are marked as "unruly," making for "unquiet minds."[37] Not every donkey must get to be a sacred deer.

Thus *Lobster*'s nameless narrator never learns what animal David turns the sociopath into … such that they could be, literally, any body—and such that every/body may have a hidden transformative history. That idea can loop in another comedic *auteur* of changing bodies: Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* imagines the present world resulting from all the bodies there have been and that have been transformed (1.1–2).[38] As in necropolitical study, that mythic metaphysics—somatophysics?—leads to ethics: the *Metamorphoses* culminates with the philosopher Pythagoras arguing for vegetarianism (15.75–142).[39] For if animal bodies or species used to be human, then meat-eating is potentially cannibalism: sacrifice made not-sacred by skipping the crucial step of substitution—as if acknowledging that the very possibility of such substitution depends on cultural categorizations.

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37 After Tudor 1995, who thus identifies the question asked by horror: "If we cannot rely on our own bodies, then on what can we rely?" (p. 37); cf. Cruz 2012:167–168.

38 On Ovidian receptions in film, esp. Winkler 2020.

39 E.g. Hardie 1995; cf. Sissa 2018.

FIGURE 10 'Opening shot' *Au Hasard Lanthimos* (?)
YORGOS LANTHIMOS (DIR.) AND THIMIOS BAKATAKIS (PHOT.), FILM. SCENE FROM *THE LOBSTER*, 2015. FRAME CAPTURE. © SONY PICTURES RELEASING INTERNATIONAL

We may go further in the context of necropolitical readings. If human bodies are always—historically, potentially, heuristically—*other* bodies, then the ultimate entropy of body to corpse, its necroteleology, is only one aspect of metamorphosis as continuous as Ovid's poem (*perpetuum … carmen* 'uninterrupted song', 1.4). As Ovid saw, the bodily differences that are marked as salient by culture are ideologically refused a history; the widest range of transformations in fact occurs simultaneously: any given moment, if somehow imaged, offers a bestiary illustrating the limitlessness of physical difference—and illuminating the arbitrariness of political projections thereon. That possibility must extend to power-structures around the most obvious seeming difference, between 'living' and 'dead'. To ask my opening question again, When is a body—when is some/body—*meaningfully* 'dead'? More pointedly, How might cultures reconfigure 'dead' such that 'living' is no longer, and for no one, a dehumanizing experience of 'living death'?

7 From a Necropolitics of Posthuman Bodies to a Critical Somatopolitics of Forbidden-Knowledge Fiction

In parallel to Agamben's critique of Foucault, S.J. Murray has argued that even "Agamben's conception of biopolitics is not radical enough" and could be

pulled up by the roots with reference to Aristotle, whose "more radical conception of the political allows us to see how death exceeds … the juridical logic of the exception."[40] As a way of challenging how biopolitical culture seeks to normalize the state of exception, Murray has in mind a question Aristotle asks in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Should *eudaimonia*, 'happiness', be attributed to the dead?" (1101a22–24).[41] The question alone, *a fortiori* the possibility, means that 'death' offers a "productive bafflement" to ideologies of bare life and related practices of exploitation: as Murray describes it, "a way to interrupt, to momentarily suspend, or to meaningfully subvert biopolitical logic through thanatopolitics."[42] This perspective emphasizes that 'death' is not a simple metaphysical (not-)state but a complex calling into enculturated modes of being. As a result, we may wonder whether 'happiness' obtains in configurations other than what a given culture marks, and markets, as 'the good life'.

Considering death in this way, as a category that is unevenly distributed across lives still being lived, would also offer an approach to further theorizing cinema like Lanthimos's. Many such films end with bafflement indeed, in *aporia*. Returning to language from Aristotle's analysis of tragic drama, we could say they lack *katharsis*—but purposefully, as if exchanging the audience's reintegration into the social life of the *polis* for a different political function: revolution. For horror in this comedic mode—not necessarily humorous but outrageous or uproarious—leaves no stone unturned, or equivalently, no body unturned-inside-out. Thus the genre's insistence on asking not only, 'Whose body survives?', as if personhood were simply classical humanistic and 'the' body normative along with it; but also and more pointedly, 'Which *kinds* of bodies live which *kinds* of lives?', and on the flipside, 'What changes made to bodies matter, producing material affects on lives?'

Answers may indeed be revolutionary. Colleagues and I have argued elsewhere that classical receptions in related genres of speculative fiction help maintain the transgressive power of the monster, i.e. its capacity for showing up the arbitrariness of boundaries by crossing them. Thus "attest[ing] to histories that trouble classical humanisms," monsters from classical myth suggest "a potentially revolutionary teratopolitics."[43] A similar logic can be applied to bodies that are *made* 'monstrous', as in body horror. On this reading, Lanthimos's cinema and others like it develop images not (merely) of biopolitics, i.e. the historical fact of cultures consigning still-living bodies to death; but (more

40 Murray 2008:205.
41 With Pritzl 1983.
42 Murray 2008:205.
43 Stevens, Weiner, and Rogers 2024.

fully) of embodiments that resist classification and, so, enact change: horror as *critical somatopolitics*.

This framing would point to films and other media that offer variations on each other's posthuman themes. In context of *Lobster* and *Deer*, an obvious point of departure would be other films about (non-human) animal bodies and their secret histories. Similar modes, ideas, and filmic devices are to be found, for example, in David Cronenberg's 1986 *The Fly* (whose special-effects grotesquerie may symbolize the ordinary horror of old age, especially in a society which, like that of Kafka's influential *Metamorphosis*, is atomizing, literalized in disintegration by matter-transmitter), Tom Six's 2009 *The Human Centipede* (*First Sequence*) (as if starting where *Lobster* finishes, with an opening shot of highway traffic, and then going further, dwelling on the horrors of an illicit basement "transformation room" where a surgeon 'matches' humans into composite creatures), and Kevin Smith's 2014 *Tusk* (feeling guilt over killing a walrus that saved his life, a man re-enacts that moment by surgically modifying captives into pseudo-walruses: hoping one will kill him and thus 'alter' that history).[44]

Such films continue modern speculative fiction's fascination with Romantic Promethean over-reach: they are all forbidden-knowledge fictions and—I think not coincidentally—all in Protean modes, linking knowledge to changeable bodies; thus Proteus himself, the 'Old Man of The Sea', who speaks the truth if only his endlessly changing body can be forced to settle down (Homer *Odyssey* 4.435–570).[45] That particular Protean combination may be found in yet other films with overlapping human and (other) animal bodies; to name only a few additional horrors centred on Proteus' domain: Curtis Harrington's 1961 *Night Tide* (whose dangerous mermaids are diegetically traced back to the Sirens of classical myth), Agnieszka Smoczyńska's 2015 *The Lure* (*Córki dancingu*) (two mermaids come of age in human nightclub culture, a risk since, should they fall in love with men but not marry, they will revert to Aphroditic sea-foam), and Robert Eggers' 2019 *The Lighthouse* (a senior lighthouse keeper is explicitly Promethean and Protean, and a junior hand fantasizes sex with a mermaid whose genitalia are shown to be shark-like, elasmobranchic).

Naturally this is not to say that all these plots are politically progressive. But it seems clear that horror, linking transgressive bodies to forbidden know-

44 Cf. Cronenberg's 2022 *Crimes of the Future*. Many such films must recall H.G. Wells's 1896 *The Island of Dr. Moreau*.

45 On Romantic Prometheis with an eye on speculative fiction, Barnett 2018; cf. Jackson 2012 on 'Promethean' elements in Vincenzo Natali's 2009 *Splice*, and Rogers and Stevens 2017, 12–14 on 'protean' fantasy.

ledge, develops vivid images of culture as bio-, thanato-, necropolitical power-structure. Insofar as swathes of horror involve classical receptions, like Lanthimos's films, they therefore focus critical attention on how modern 'personhood' has remained implicitly pegged to 'classical humanism'. And since, finally, such modern constructions of antiquity have, like Classics, recently come under good and necessary pressure, horror invites us to consider possibilities for changed present and future, in which 'our' lives are no longer dependent on 'others'' living deaths. The fact that such possibilities can be subject matter for comedy invites a deep consideration of the positive prospects of posthumanism. On this reading, horror has long been essaying "narratology beyond the human" in part by engaging in critical classical receptions.[46]

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46 "Narratology beyond the Human": Herman 2018, esp. 202–242 and 249–294.

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This is the first collection of essays approaching aspects of Greek antiquity and its reception through 'necropolitics'. It discovers traces of necropolitics in the unburied and maltreated corpses of the Homeric epics; it follows the manifestations of necropower in Greek tragedy, historiography, and biography; and it delves into torture, capital punishment, and non-normative burials in the ancient Greek world. It contributes to the debate – much of which is only available in modern Greek – on recent archaeological evidence, notably the iron-bound individuals discovered in the Athenian suburb of Phaleron, and includes a captivating exploration of necropolitics in Yorgos Lanthimos's Greek-tragedy-inspired cinema.

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This book is volume 492 in the series
MNEMOSYNE SUPPLEMENTS.

ISSN 0169-8958
brill.com/mns

ISBN: 978-90-04-71840-1
9 789004 718401