

LIVERPOOL STUDIES IN ANCIENT HISTORY



DEATH IMAGINED

Ancient Perceptions of Death and Dying

EDITED BY *Karolina Sekita*
AND *Katherine E. Southwood*

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LIVERPOOL STUDIES IN ANCIENT HISTORY

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EDITED BY
KAROLINA SEKITA AND
KATHERINE E. SOUTHWOOD

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Preface

We are enormously grateful to St John's College, Oxford, for the generous 'Meeting of Minds' grant between Katherine E. Southwood (Principal Investigator) and Karolina Sekita (Co-Investigator) which we secured as part of a wider project on 'Death Imagined', of which this volume is a part. The funding from the College has enabled us to make the book available to an unrestricted audience, and to foster international collaboration. However, the College has been far more than a source of financial support. St John's has provided a stimulating research environment as well as an intellectual and compassionate community, many of whom are excellent dialogue partners and who enable us to generate new ideas and approaches. Indeed, the scholarly community in St John's is an incredible advantage for research. There are too many amazing people who we are lucky enough to have encountered through the College to name individually but we would specifically like to recognise the current and former Head of House, Sue Black and Maggie Snowling, under whose stewardship the College operated during our 'Death Imagined' project.

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We relish the opportunity to thank each and every one of our contributors for their participation in the volume. The act of wilful collaboration and teamwork has been important to us and we hope that our efforts will have contributed in a meaningful way to dialogue around the topic of death and the value of imagination in research. In this spirit, we would also like to thank our anonymous readers for peer-reviewing and receiving our responses to the proposal with Liverpool University Press. Their assistance helped us to see a clearer path to making the volume as coherent as possible. In addition, we extend our most sincere gratitude to our research assistant, Artur Suski, for his patience and diligence in his formatting work

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Katherine E. Southwood and Karolina Sekita

Introduction

Karolina Sekita and Katherine E. Southwood

It goes without saying that death powerfully provokes human imagination. It generates rituals, belief systems, questions about identity, defying the boundaries of culture and time. In recent years, quite unexpectedly, it became even more visible, given the recent pandemic and the harvest it gathered, reminding us that we are *being-towards-death* (*Sein-zum-Tode*), as Heidegger powerfully described it,¹ and challenging us to confront our own humanity in all its varied aspects. Even though death was more omnipresent in ancient thought than it is today in the world which shook its cold embrace off through medical improvements and technological advancements, it has not been (cannot, and must not, be) completely eradicated – hence, reflection on how we deal with it remains essential.

Death is one of the areas of antiquity most explored in scholarship. Yet the most investigated and popular topic, widely discussed in scholarship since Erwin Rohde's monumental study *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (1890–94), concerns beliefs about postmortem existence. Furthermore, although it is certainly the subject of vivid scholarly interest, this seems mainly to manifest itself within the boundaries of one culture or discipline. A survey of the main scholarly works concerning beliefs about death displays the level of interest in the topic across a range of fields.² Indeed, almost every corner of the Mediterranean received some attention: Greece,³

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 295–311.

² Cf. recently Hilary Marlow, Karla Pollmann, and Helen Van Noorden, eds, *Eschatology in Antiquity: Forms and Functions* (London: Routledge, 2021).

³ Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979); Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *'Reading' Greek Death: To the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2002); Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the 'Orphic' Gold Tablets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); George Alexander Gazis and Anthony Hooper, eds, *Aspects of Death and*

Rome,⁴Mesopotamia,⁵Levant,⁶

and

the Afterlife in Greek Literature (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021). ‘Orphic’ ideas of afterlife: Alberto Bernabé Pajares and Anna Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Instructions for the Netherworld: The Orphic Gold Tablets* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets* (London: Routledge, 2007; and 2nd edn, 2013); Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, ed., *The ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets and Greek Religion: Further along the Path* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Redefining Ancient Orphism: A Study in Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴ Franz Cumont, *Afterlife in Roman Paganism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1922); Jean Prieur, *La Mort dans l’antiquité romaine* (Rennes: Ouest France, 1986); François Hinard, ed., *La Mort, les morts et l’au-delà dans le monde romain* (Caen: L’université de Caen, 1987); François Hinard, ed., *La Mort au quotidien dans le monde romain* (Paris: De Boccard, 1995); John Pearce, Martin Millet, and Manuela Struck, eds, *Burial, Society and Context in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2000); Catharine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Mario Erasmo, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2008); Valerie M. Hope, *Roman Death* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Charles W. King, *The Ancient Roman Afterlife: Di Manes, Belief, and the Cult of the Dead* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2020).

⁵ Dina Katz, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2003); Caitlín E. Barrett, ‘Was Dust Their Food and Clay Their Bread? Grave Goods, the Mesopotamian Afterlife, and the Liminal Role of Inana/Ishtar’, *JANER*, 7.1 (2007), pp. 7–65.

⁶ Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins GmbH, 1986); Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SMC, 1992); Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner, eds, *Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaism of Antiquity*, *Judaism in Late Antiquity* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Rachel S. Hallote, *Death, Burial, and Afterlife in the Biblical World: How the Israelites and Their Neighbors Treated the Dead* (Chicago, IL: Dee, 2001); Rachel S. Hallote, ed., ‘Special Issue: The Archaeology of Death’, *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 65.2 (2002); Claudia J. Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Doctrine, Community, and Self-Definition* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2004); George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, exp. edn, *Harvard Theological Studies* 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Kerry M. Sonia, *Caring for the Dead in Ancient Israel* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2020). Philological studies of Sheol: Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*, *Biblica et Orientalia* 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969); Philip Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollon, 2002). Embodiment of the dead: Matthew J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Matthew J. Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Status of the corpse and land: Saul M. Olyan, ‘Unnoticed Resonances of Tomb Opening and Transportation of the

Egypt.⁷ This comes as no surprise, given a strong general interest in the beyond in anthropology and cultural studies: see, for instance, studies on the formation of hell by Bernstein⁸ or the edited volumes by Metcalf and Huntington on the anthropology of mortuary ritual,⁹ by Moreira and Toscano on hell and afterlife from historical and contemporary perspectives,¹⁰ and by Segal on the history of the afterlife in Western religions.¹¹ Apart from direct interest in the afterlife, burial customs and rituals are very often studied, mainly from an archaeological perspective.¹² The trend

Remains of the Dead in Ezekiel 37:12–14’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 128.3 (2009), pp. 491–501; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 473 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010).

⁷ Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, trans. by D. Lorton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Mark Smith, *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Mark Smith, *Following Osiris: Perspectives on the Osirian Afterlife from Four Millennia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Individual studies on *Books of the Dead*: E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (New York: Dover, 1967); Ogden Goelet Jr, Raymond O. Faulkner, Carol A. C. Andrews, J. Daniel Gunther, and James Wasserman, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day. The Complete Papyrus of Ani, Featuring Integrated Text and Full-Color Images* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1994); Paul F. O’Rourke, *An Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Sobekmose* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2016), Rita Lucarelli and Martin Andreas Stadler, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

⁸ Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁹ Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Isabel Moreira and Margaret Merrill Toscano, *Hell and Its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

¹¹ Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

¹² Rome: Virginia L. Campbell, *The Tombs of Pompeii: Organization, Space, and Society*, Routledge Series in Ancient History (London: Routledge, 2014). Greece: Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Jewish tradition: Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, ‘From Womb to Tomb: The Israelite Family in Death as in Life’, in *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel*, ed. by P. Dutcher-Walls (New York: T&T Clark International, 2009), pp. 122–31; Stephen L. Cook, ‘Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel’, *Religion Compass*, 1.6 (2007), pp. 660–83; Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimovitz, ‘The Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb: Family Response at a Time of Change’, *Israel Exploration Journal*, 58.2 (2008), pp. 150–70; Jodi Magness, ‘Ossuaries and the Burials of Jesus and James’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 124.1 (2005), pp. 121–54; Eric M. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth. Secondary Burials in Their Ancient Near Eastern Setting* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971). Mesopotamia: Nicola Laneri, *I costumi funerari della media vallata dell’Eufrate durante il III millennio*

of shifting from beliefs to senses and emotions related to death has already surfaced in scholarship, but to a limited extent, with studies usually focusing on a single topic or region.¹³

This volume builds on, develops, and joins in conversation with the insights these valuable contributions to research provide, even though it takes a different approach. Instead of belief systems, to which we have no real access nowadays, it focuses on ‘impressions’ (i.e. individual and communal perceptions of, and ideas about, how death was imagined – as embedded in language and images for example) behind the ancient descriptions of death and dying, and their representations in funerary contexts. In other words, the volume’s main interest is in *conceptualisations* of death and the process of dying, made manifest in metaphors used to encode them in writing (literature, epitaphs), funerary monuments (internal and external decoration of tombs), grave goods, and preserved attestations of funerary rituals. Shifting the focus of the discussion from *beliefs* about death to *perceptions* is important, as it allows critical space for the exploration of behaviours and practices, and highlights the potential for thinking about human experience.

The decision to focus the volume specifically on the ancient Mediterranean stems from the fact that this region is a distinctive and yet diverse unit of study with its own environmental, economic, and cultural characteristics.¹⁴ However, we have also decided to include a study of the Incan

a.C. (Naples: Università degli studi di Napoli, 2004). See also Nicola Laneri’s edited volume: *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Colin Renfrew, Michael J. Boyd, and Iain Morley, eds, *Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World: ‘Death Shall Have No Dominion’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹³ Robert Garland, ‘The Sensory Aesthetics of Death’, in *A Cultural History of Death in Antiquity*, ed. by Mario Erasmio (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024), pp. 33–48; Seth Estrin, *Grief Made Marble: Funerary Sculpture in Classical Athens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023); Zahra Newby and Ruth Toulson, eds, *The Materiality of Mourning. Cross-disciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2019); Nathan T. Arrington, ‘Touch and Remembrance in Greek Funerary Art’, *Art Bulletin*, 100 (2018), pp. 7–27; Juliette Harrison, ed., *Imagining the Afterlife in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2018); Michael Squire, ‘Embodying the Dead on Classical Attic Grave-Stelai’, *Art History*, 41.3 (2018), pp. 518–45; Verity Platt, ‘Framing the Dead on Roman Sarcophagi’, in *The Frame in Classical Art: A Cultural History*, ed. by Verity Platt and Michael Squire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 353–82; Janet Huskinson, *Roman Strigillated Sarcophagi: Art and Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Markus Bradley et al., eds, *The Senses in Antiquity*, 6 vols (Durham: Acumen; London: Routledge, 2013–15); Jaś Elsner and Wu Hung, eds, *Sarcophagi, RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 61/62 (2012).

¹⁴ See, especially, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000).

perception of death and the beyond as a comparative and contrastive touch. Furthermore, the collection of essays in this volume is crucially interdisciplinary, both in terms of the research fields and cultures involved in its inquiry: examining various ancient cultural responses to death and dying side by side makes it possible to reflect carefully on the significance and impact of death on living communities and cultures. As such, we believe, this volume will contribute to the ongoing exploration of ways in which human beings continually imagine and navigate the uncomfortable, but crucially significant, topic of inevitable mortality. We hope that the comparative and exploratory nature of this collection will enhance research across disciplinary boundaries and pave the way for exciting new areas of future investigation and thought. However, it will also, we hope, open new possible routes to approach the topic of death and dying in antiquity as well as a cultural and conceptual exchange broadly understood.

The volume is arranged thematically in three sections, marking the key themes governing the essays gathered under their headlines: *Processing Death*; *Perceiving Death Through Ritual and Burial*; *The Beyond*. Individual contributions, however, transgress their boundaries, tackling more general issues, such as the complex ways in which the living conceive of and imagine their relationships with those who have died. They pose questions about social expectations connected with grief and mourning after death as well as how the bodies of those who are dead are perceived, imagined and dealt with, showing that death can be seen as reconfiguring experience and existence among the living. The essays also emphasise the importance of ritual, and the ways in which ritual brings vitality and layers of meaning to burial. In particular, objects and places used in constructing religious traditions and ideas are explored in the light of their mythological associations and cultural motifs. Whether through deposition of corpses in unusual places related to superstition or magic, or re-enacting heroic past through mythological scenes of sacrifice on sarcophagi, the ongoing ritual importance of burial is emphasised. Ritual performances are also explored in the light of olfactory and other sensory details described in death rituals. Another key theme linking these essays together is the notion of liminality surrounding the corpse at the point between death and burial, and its imaginary placement in the memory or oblivion of the living. Contributors highlight also the difficulty in interpretation of meanings behind poetic material as well as funerary monuments, such as tombs, sarcophagi, and tomb painting, as vehicles for representation of ideas about death, and offer new possible tools and ways of interpretation, showing familiar material in an unfamiliar way.

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Section I

Processing Death

Katherine E. Southwood and Karolina Sekita

No one knows the face of death, or its voice – no one can picture it. Yet, as chapters gathered in this section confirm, it is highly perceptible: whether through the moment of death, the gap between it and the arrival at the actual abode of the dead, or through the dead themselves. All these images, deceptively familiar and almost unreflectively passed by when encountered in literary or pictorial representation, create the need to understand and describe something that cannot be described. Yet the details are very suggestive. Is this an attempt to accommodate something that always evades us, but is so intently present? The ancients seem restless in their pursuit of encapsulating the essence of death through reflection on the process of dying.

This emerges through the central concern of Euripides' *Alcestis*, which dramatises the final day of the titular protagonist, who offers to die in her husband's stead: the struggle between life and death *par excellence*. The play provides unique insight into the process of dying and the grief it brings, with a specific focus on the emotionally piercing, confronting, and confusing depths of its initial stages. It serves as an excellent example of primary material that opens up a conversation about how death was imagined and perceived in ancient Greece. A central struggle between human life and death is a tension that can be discerned in the way Richard Hunter presents the evidence and suggests plausible arguments surrounding it. One ethical and moral tension that emerges is the question of whether the Fates should be tricked? Another tension is produced by Alcestis in her untethered state, as she exists 'both alive and dead' and is 'in the struggle of the spirit'.

Throughout the essay, Hunter draws attention to the ways in which dreams and images provide entry into how death was imagined, allowing for a retained sense of contact between the living and the dead. Similar to the liminality of Alcestis' state, dreams and images can be seen as

gateways for the imagination and perceptions into the subjectivity of the encounter with grief. In dreams and through images, consciousness may be less objective. While this does not enable true contact with those who have departed, it does reveal the deep-seated yet unrequited human need, especially in the initial stages of grief, to resist and deny death's reality. Or, as Hunter phrases it, our own 'emotional projection' may point towards how we 'seek to deceive our emptiness' and find comfort in imagining the company of the absent beloved, even when that communion is, in reality, severed.

Finally, a crucial point that Hunter highlights is the way in which the concepts of 'believing', 'imagining', and 'seeming' blur together. One implication raised by this observation is: if the difference between imagination and belief is merely semantic, does that render it unhelpful? Likewise, if the answer is an affirmative, how can we then make a concrete case for using imagination and perception as critical tools when engaging with death in antiquity? Through the play, we learn very little information that can be systematically outlined as beliefs. However, there is insight to be gained through the invitation to the imagination (even if it potentially also points to beliefs, whether or not they may be verified) because it incites empathy with the emotions of characters. This, in turn, may serve as a vehicle, drawing us into the play's approach to and depiction of grief on both a conceptual and metaphorical level.

Dina Katz's contribution to the volume explores Mesopotamian perceptions of death, encapsulated in commonly used metaphors to describe the land of the dead, the journey to it, and its inhabitants. Katz prioritises words, acknowledging their careful selection by scribal schools: while the journey to the netherworld carries poetic and metaphorical resonances, it is also conceptualised as a reality. Katz makes the interesting observation that, similarly to the tricking of the Fates in *Alcestis*, incantations and rituals in Mesopotamian and Sumerian texts are used to postpone impending death. The inevitability and uncontrollable nature of death, imagined as fate, is common to both Greece and Mesopotamia, despite their cultural and temporal distance.

As with the liminal, confrontational nature of grief shortly after bereavement, as presented by Hunter, here the imagination leaps into the unknown nature of death. Through the act of going beyond what is familiar, the unfamiliar becomes less uncomfortable. Although the Mesopotamians seemed to hold no positive expectations for human life after death, the metaphor of the journey and the liminality of spaces between life and death – for example, a sunset in the west – offer a representational perception and imaginative entry point. This invites readers to reflect on the ever-changing nature of life and its impermanence.

Rita Lucarelli examines ancient Egyptian funerary literature and

iconography to understand the conception of the (deceased) body in Egyptian thought. It appears that death was imagined by the Egyptians through a transfigured corporeality manifest in two dimensions: the tomb itself (a spatial confinement of the decomposing body) and the *Duat*, the ancient Egyptian beyond. These physical and spiritual dimensions of death, as Lucarelli emphasises, were not seen as opposite but rather as complementary. Lucarelli also carefully analyses the terminology related to images of the deceased, such as ‘statue’, ‘likeness’, ‘manifestation’, ‘guide’, ‘image’, noting that these terms differ according to their context and literary or magical setting but are essential for understanding the body’s role in Egyptian magical and funerary practices and beliefs. The images associated with these terms vary from a mummified body or a composite crocodile figure to a bird with the head of the deceased (interpreted as the ‘soul’), which must return to the tomb every night to reunite with the body and reanimate it, as may be suggested by a dark skeletal silhouette, interpreted by Lucarelli as a body weakened by the absence of its soul. It looks like also in the Egyptian culture both the images and the terms used to describe them were rooted in the perception of death by the living. Lucarelli concludes that death was imagined as ‘an empowering experience and unique chance to trespass the confinement of the tomb and of the human body itself, by magically acquiring freedom of movement and the possibility to go in and out of the tomb’.

Lidia Ozarowska explores the vision of death and afterlife in the Incan culture. The main challenge, as the author states, lies in the scarcity and indirect nature of available sources – primarily those written by Incan descendants (closest to indigenous accounts), Spanish explorers, missionaries, and governors. The vocabulary specific to the underworldly matters sometimes shows Spanish/Christian influence (for instance, the soul is referred to as *alma*, and the spirit as *ánima*), but the Incan perception of death and dying as well as the vision of the other world does not appear to be affected by it. Instead of Heaven and Hell, we find images very familiar to us from the ancient Mediterranean: the challenging journey of the dead is deceptively similar to that known from ancient Egypt, and the mirroring of the world of the living (paths, trees, bodies of water) as well as location of the Underworld in the west finds direct reflection in most ancient Mediterranean cultures. Yet, there is no forgetfulness or lack of perception after Incan death; the dead are imagined as conscious and perceptive, especially during the journey they embark on during the first five days after death. Moreover, the living were obliged to assist the dead in their transition to the beyond, providing nourishment, necessary implements, and, most importantly, protection, to prevent the anger of the deceased and their potential return to seek a living companion, who would then be compelled to follow them on the path to eternity. Another intriguing aspect

of the Incan conception of the afterlife is that the dead could remain very present in the world of the living, manifesting as ghosts, undead revenants, or petrified images (*huacas*) in the visible world.

Most importantly, however, for the Incas, death was a gradual transition or shift of balance, as Ożarowska describes it, ‘between the animate and the inanimate, the material and the spiritual’, which is also reflected in the changing terminology used to describe the dead at various stages of this transition. In a way, thus, death was not perceived as the end of life but rather as a new stage in the process of becoming, with everything viewed as fluid and interconnected.

All the four chapters, in their unique ways, grapple with the uncontrollable nature of death and, through the detailed discussion of the evidence, help us understand how the ancient cultures, seemingly disparate, perceived death and what their responses to its unavoidable power were. Their perspectives often rely on physically observable phenomena accessible through sensory perception, be it the natural processes the body undergoes after death or its debilitation within the process of dying. It seems that to the ancient eyes death was everything that life was not, presenting an image of the land of the dead as a negative or even distorted reflection of the world of the living. Here, human imagination around the concept of death becomes a powerful tool for opening dialogue and reflecting on the transient nature of life. Interestingly, many themes and metaphors related to death or experience of dying are sensual, involving haptic, acoustic, olfactory, visual, and taste sensations. Thus, this imaginary world is formed and conceptualised through being grounded in perception. While this demonstrates the limitations placed upon the human condition, it also points – through imagination – towards a sense of ourselves as, in a way, unlimited, given our capacity to project ourselves beyond the boundaries of experience.

Chapter 1

Death and Mourning in Euripides' *Alcestis*

Richard Hunter

Perhaps the most remarkable classical text concerned with ideas about dying is Euripides' *Alcestis*, produced in Athens in 438 BCE and the earliest of his dramas to have survived complete. The play dramatises the final day of Alcestis, who has offered to die in place of her husband Admetus, and her saving by Heracles from Thanatos, 'personified' Death, who has come to demand his due;¹ at the end of the play Heracles restores the rescued Alcestis to her unknowing husband in one of the most remarkable, indeed strangest, scenes of all Greek tragedy. At the heart of the play lie both Alcestis' farewells and the actual process of her passing and, in reaction to these, the lamentations and regret of her husband, saved (apparently) by his wife's sacrifice but in fact left utterly bereft.

No other extant Attic tragedy stages the process of dying in front of the audience, as does *Alcestis*. In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the hero commits suicide by impaling himself on his sword, perhaps in view of the audience – the matter remains hotly debated² – but, even if that is indeed so, the sudden brutal finality of the act, a decisiveness emphasised by Ajax's repeated wishes that his death be a swift one (vv. 822, 833–34, 853), by a reigning sense of uncertainty and foreboding and by the contrast between that irreversible action and the hero's great speech about the inevitability of change and the need for flexibility (the so-called 'Speech of deception', *Trugrede*, vv. 646–92) which preceded, is both shocking and epic in its conception. Very different, and very differently shocking, is Alcestis' death.

We learn from Apollo in the prologue that Alcestis was the only person willing to die in place of Admetus when Apollo tricked the Fates (Moirai) into allowing Admetus to postpone death (in the short term), provided that

¹ To what extent Thanatos in the *Alcestis* differs from Hades and how much his representation is a one-off poetic invention of Euripides remain difficult and open questions; see e.g. Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 58–59.

² See Glenn W. Most and Leyla Ozbek, eds, *Staging Ajax's Suicide* (Pisa: Scuola normale superiore di Pisa, 2015).

someone would take his place. In many traditional narratives based around this folktale motif of ‘substitute death’, the death takes place on the same day as the deal is struck, but this is clearly not the case in the *Alcestis*.³ The deal with the Moirai lies at some unexpressed time in the past; all we know is that ‘today is the day’ (vv. 20–21). It is almost as though Alcestis has been ‘dying’ ever since her agreement to take Admetus’ place (when was that?), and everyone, particularly her husband, has known that; one of the reasons, I think, why the first half of the play can seem so powerful today is that it is so close to the bone. We live in a world where medical diagnoses can be ‘death sentences’ – ‘three months, six at most’ – and even if the day is not fixed, the process of watching someone ‘dying’ over a more or less extended period is both commonplace and shattering; everyone knows what is coming, however we try to buy off the inevitable. This is dying as so many people now know it, but it finds a remarkable foreshadowing in a Greek play from more than two and a half millennia ago.

While on stage, Alcestis is in a kind of in-between state; she is, as her maid tells the chorus, ‘both alive and dead’ (v. 141);⁴ both Apollo and the maid describe her state as *psychorrhagousa* (ψυχορραγούσα, vv. 20, 143), ‘in the struggle of the spirit’,⁵ the earliest attestation of that term in Greek. Euripides in fact is the only poet of the classical period whom we know to have used the term; at *Heracles* 324, it is used of children who are dying but still able to call out to their mother and, at *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1466, apparently of women who die in childbirth. Later, we find it in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius of a hero close to death after the attack of a wild boar (2.833) and it then becomes more common in imperial Greek prose. In the *Heracles* and the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the term *may* mean no more than ‘gasping their last breaths’ (i.e. very close to death) but the case of the *Alcestis* seems rather different; this *psychorrhagia* is rather drawn out.⁶ It has indeed been suggested that the *Alcestis* anticipates the later Christian ‘struggle of the soul (to break free from the body)’, which has long been acknowledged to have pre-Christian roots in Greek tradition.⁷ In her seminal book on Greek lament, Margaret Alexiou suggested that the fight over Alcestis between Heracles and Thanatos was a ‘concrete’ version of the struggle,⁸ but if so – and the idea is very attractive – then Euripides

³ See L. P. E. Parker, *Euripides’ Alcestis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. xii–xiv, citing earlier bibliography.

⁴ This is picked up with bitter irony at vv. 520–21.

⁵ See further below.

⁶ This form of the noun is not in fact attested until very late antiquity; medieval and modern Greek use the form *psychorrhagēma*.

⁷ See further below and Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 2nd edn (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 5; Garland, *Greek Way*, p. 19.

⁸ Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, p. 5.

has twice dramatised that struggle in the play, once as narrative (Heracles and Thanatos) and once, in Alcestis' final moments, before the eyes of the audience. Such a doubling is in fact a familiar dramatic technique.

At v. 233, the chorus announce the arrival on stage of the dying Alcestis:

ἦδ' ἐκ δόμων δὴ καὶ πόσις πορεύεται.
 βόασον ὧ στέναξον ὧ Φεραία
 χθῶν τὰν ἀρίσταν
 γυναιῖκα μαραιομένην νόσῳ
 κατὰ γᾶς χθόνιον παρ' Ἄϊδαν.

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Euripides, *Alcestis* 233–37

Here she comes out of the house, and her husband with her.
 Cry aloud, O land of Pherae, weep for the noblest of all wives
 wasting away to Hades beneath the earth with fatal sickness!⁹

One ancient or Byzantine commentator at least observed (disapprovingly) that the following farewells and death scene should in fact be imagined as taking place inside the house, not on stage in view of the audience (Scholium on v. 234);¹⁰ for part of the scene at least Alcestis is lying down and, when not, must be supported by her husband and/or attendants. Such showing of what 'in real life' would more probably take place indoors, behind the *skēnē*, is of course very common in Greek drama, but the grammarian's literal-mindedness draws our attention to how particularly intimate is the scene which follows.¹¹ Alcestis' first words in fact, an address to the sun (v. 244), are both entirely 'natural' for a person for whom there will soon only be darkness and also, by implication, 'naturalise' the fact that she and Admetus have come out 'into the open air' for what is a very 'private' scene. Admetus follows her lead and uses the universal vision of the sun, which sees all things truly, to display the injustice of what is happening:

ὄρᾱι σε κάμῃ, δύο κακῶς πεπραγότας,
 οὐδὲν θεοῦς δρᾶσαντας ἀνθ' ὅτου θανῆι.
 Euripides, *Alcestis* 246–47¹²

[The sun] sees you and me, two unfortunates, who have done
 nothing to the gods to deserve your death.

⁹ Translations of Euripides in this essay are taken from the Loeb edition of David Kovacs, adapted where necessary.

¹⁰ The scholium is found only in B, a Paris manuscript of the eleventh century.

¹¹ Desmond J. Conacher, *Euripides: Alcestis* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988), p. 166, writes of the scene's 'intense privacy'.

¹² Christian Keime points out to me that, taken by itself, ἀνθ' ὅτου θανῆι might carry a different resonance, 'in whose place you are dying', which is indeed what is happening; such ironies abound in the language of Admetus.

The exchange which follows deserves quotation at length, as it is an extended and, for us, unique dramatisation of the process of dying. Alcestis sings in emotionally expressive lyrics, whereas Admetus speaks in iambic trimeters, the standard metre of tragic speech:

Αλ. γαῖά τε καὶ μελάθρων στέγαι
 νυμφίδιοί τε κοῖ-
 ται πατρίας Ἴωλκοῦ.
 Αδ. ἔπαιρε σαυτήν, ὦ τάλαινα, μὴ προδώῃς· 250
 λίσσου δὲ τοὺς κρατοῦντας οἰκτῖραι θεοῦς.

Αλ. ὀρῶ δίκωπον ὀρῶ σκάφος ἐν
 λίμναι· νεκύων δὲ πορθμεὺς
 ἔχων χέρ' ἐπὶ κοντῶι Χάρων
 μ' ἤδη καλεῖ· Τί μέλλεις; 255
 ἐπείγου· σὺ κατείργεις· τάδε τοί με
 σπερχόμενος ταχύνει.

Αδ. οἴμοι· πικράν γε τήνδε μοι ναυκληρίαν
 ἔλεξας, ὦ δύσδαιμον, οἷα πάσχομεν.

Αλ. ἄγει μ' ἄγει τις, ἄγει μέ τις (οὐχ
 ὀρᾶς;) νεκύων ἐς ἀυλάν, 260
 ὑπ' ὀφρύσι κυαναυγέσι
 βλέπων περωτὸς Ἄιδας.
 τί ρέξεις; ἄφες· οἷαν ὁδὸν ἄ δει-
 λαιοτάτα προβαίνω.

Αδ. οἰκτρὰν φίλοισιν, ἐκ δὲ τῶν μάλιστ' ἐμοὶ
 καὶ παισίν, οἷς δὴ πένθος ἐν κοινῶι τόδε. 265

Αλ. μέθετε μέθετέ μ' ἤδη·
 κλίνατ', οὐ σθένω ποσίν.
 πλησίον Ἄιδας, σκοτία
 δ' ἐπ' ὄσσοισι νύξ ἐφέρπει.
 τέκνα τέκν', οὐκέτι δὴ 270
 οὐκέτι μάτηρ σφῶιν ἔστιν.
 χαίροντες, ὦ τέκνα, τόδε φάος ὀρῶιτον.

Euripides, *Alcestis* 248–72

Al. O land and palace and maiden bed of my ancestral Iolcus!

Ad. Rouse yourself up, poor woman, do not abandon me! Pray for pity to the gods who have you in their grasp!

Al. I see the two-oared boat in the lake. Charon, the ferryman of the dead, his hand on the boat pole, calls me now: 'Why are you tarrying? Make haste, you hinder my going!' He speaks impatiently, urging me on with these words.

Ad. Oh, it is a bitter ferrying you speak of! O my luckless wife, what suffering is ours!

Al. Someone is taking, is taking me (don't you see him?) away to the court of the dead. It is winged Hades, glowing from beneath his dark brows. What do you want? Let me go! Ah, what a journey it is that I, unhappiest of women, am making!

Ad. A journey to make your loved ones weep, especially the children and me, who feel this as their common grief.

Al. Let me go, let me go now! Lay me back, I have no strength in my legs! Hades is near and night creeps darkly over my eyes.

Children, children, your mother is no more, no more! Farewell, my children, joy be yours as you look on the light of the sun!

Alcestis sees terrifying visions of Charon, the ferryman of the dead, summoning her and of winged Hades taking her off to the Underworld,¹³ but she is clearly resisting and clinging to life. We seem here very close to a passage of the Christian Archbishop John Chrysostom (fourth century CE), which Margaret Alexiou cited to illustrate the later notion of 'the struggle of the soul':

For this reason you can hear the ordinary people telling of fearful sights and frightening visions at that time, and those who are departing cannot bear even the sight of them, and as they are lying down they cause the very bed to shake with great force and they gaze terrifyingly on those who are around them; the soul inside is pushing itself (ἐαυτὴν εἰσωθοῦσης) and refusing to be broken free from the body (ὀκνοῦσης ἀπορραγῆναι τοῦ σώματος) and unable to bear the sight of the approaching angels.¹⁴

The scene from the *Alcestis* looks very much like a 'pagan' lyric dramatisation of the *psychorrhagēma* of later Christian tradition; the Christians are in terror of the judgement that awaits them, whereas Alcestis sees 'visions' of the traditional Underworld figures who mark the end of life. That Alcestis recovers sufficiently to deliver a lengthy iambic *rhēsis* (vv. 280–325) in which she makes her final requests to Admetus does not at all detract from the power and the significance of her lyric struggle with death; the two scenes are complementary dramatisations in different modes of the approach of death, a complementarity emphasised by the parallel manner in which both end with farewells to her children and the descent of darkness (268–72 ~ 385–91).

¹³ The role and description of Hades here have caused much puzzlement, as neither seems traditional. See the note of Parker, *Euripides' Alcestis*, ad loc. With vv. 268–69, which derives ultimately from descriptions of the death of warriors in the *Iliad*, it is hard not to compare the famous lyrics of Bob Dylan's 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door'.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 54 (= Migne 1862, p. 532).

Such a juxtaposition of lyric and iambic presentations is certainly not unique, but in the present case we might wonder whether there is not also a contrast between the stylised exchange of iambic speeches (of 46 and 40 verses respectively), an exchange with many parallels in the formal structures of drama, and the remarkable lyric visions of *Alcestis*, which are very hard to parallel until much later periods. If it is the case that these visions of Charon and a winged Death draw on widespread ‘popular’ conceptions which otherwise standardly fall below the radar of the elite literature that survives, then this, like perhaps personified Thanatos himself, would be another element which brings *Alcestis* closer to folktale traditions than is the case with almost any other tragedy.¹⁵ Be that as it may, there is indeed very little comparative evidence from the classical period with which to illuminate *Alcestis*’ song of struggle. The passage which comes closest is from one of Socrates’ accounts of death in Plato’s *Phaedo*. Socrates explains that at death each person’s *daimōn* (‘overseeing spirit’) takes charge of the *psychē* to guide it to the Underworld:

Now the orderly and wise (κοσμία τε καὶ φρόνιμος) soul follows and does not fail to recognize its situation. But the one that lusts after the needs of the body (ἐπιθυμητικῶς τοῦ σώματος ἔχουσα), such as I talked about earlier, having fluttered (ἐπτοημένη) around it and the visible region for a long time, and having resisted and suffered a great deal (πολλὰ ἀντιτείνασα καὶ πολλὰ παθοῦσα), is led away by force (βία) and with difficulty by his appointed spirit.

Plato, *Phaedo* 108a–b (trans. by Emlyn-Jones and Preddy, adapted)

Socrates’ dichotomy is a very philosophical one: an ‘orderly and wise (φρόνιμος)’ soul, the philosopher’s soul above all, will be keen to follow the *daimōn* and escape from the body as soon as possible, whereas the soul which ‘desires the body’ will resist and struggle and eventually have to be forced to depart for judgement. ‘Desire for the body’ is a negative way of putting a wish to continue to live which, it is reasonable to suppose, is the wish of the vast majority of the dying (both in antiquity and now). It is not improbable that Plato makes Socrates employ traditional ideas about the ‘struggle of the soul’ and apply them to unphilosophical souls in order to highlight what is important (and very unusual, if not

¹⁵ Such considerations are normally an important element in arguments for the ‘pro-satyrlic’ nature of the play, which was performed as the fourth element (normally a satyr-drama) in Euripides’ dramatic offering in 438 BCE. I will not pursue this subject further in the current essay.

unique) in the philosophical soul (i.e. that of Socrates).¹⁶ Socrates slips almost imperceptibly from this dichotomy in 108a to a distinction (108b–c) between a soul which is ‘impure’ (ἀκάθαρτος) and has committed unjust murders or other foul deeds and one which has lived ‘purely and appropriately’ (καθαρῶς τε καὶ μετρίως), as though the two pairs of opposites were the same (which of course they are not). Behind the philosophical spin which Socrates puts upon the idea of the *psychorrhagia*, we can perhaps perceive very widespread ideas that surface only rarely in the texts which survive. Alcestis has chosen to die, but resists death, as she would of course prefer to stay with her children and husband. This hardly seems paradoxical: she may be ‘desirous of the body’, in Platonic terms, but it would be very hard to describe her soul as ‘impure’. Her dramatic struggle on stage to ‘resist’ death not only replays a universal struggle, but in fact emphasises her virtue and the injustice of what she suffers.

If the *Alcestis* offers us a glimpse of a rarely seen world of popular belief about the process of dying, it seems also full of language that we recognise from inscribed poetic epitaphs,¹⁷ although the vast majority of these are later than the *Alcestis*; most of our fifth-century evidence concerns public burials for those killed in war, not private epitaphs for family members. Alcestis is repeatedly praised in ways which are familiar from the epitaphic tradition: she is/was ἀρίστη γυνή, ‘best of wives’ (83, 151–52, 240, 324, 442, 899), εὐκλεής, ‘of glorious reputation’ (150), πιστή, ‘faithful’ (368, 880, 901), ἐσθλή, ‘excellent’ (418, 615, 1083), and σώφρων, ‘chaste’ (615). Other familiar funerary motifs from inscribed epitaphs include the choral prayer that the earth ‘fall lightly’ upon Alcestis (463–64)¹⁸ and the prominence of Charon, ferryman of the dead, who appears in the play not just in Alcestis’ visions (252–58, 439–44); the chorus’ wish (744–46) that Alcestis enjoy in the Underworld any special pleasures reserved for ‘the good’ also finds many echoes in later epitaphs.

¹⁶ Richard Seaford, *Tragedy, Ritual and Money in Ancient Greece: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chap. 18, associates the ‘fluttering soul’ in the *Phaedo* rather with ideas of mystic initiation; there are certainly areas of overlap between the ‘struggle of the soul’ and the initiatory experience.

¹⁷ See Daniel I. Iakov, *Εὐριπίδης Ἀλλησθη*, 2 vols (Athens: MIET, 2012), 1, pp. 114–23; on the language of private epitaphs from Athens, see especially Christos C. Tsagalīs, *Inscribing Sorrow: Fourth-Century Attic Funerary Epigrams*, Trends in Classics 1 – Supplementary Volumes (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008). This section re-uses and abbreviates material from Richard Hunter, *Greek Epitaphic Poetry: A Selection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 29–33, where fuller bibliography and discussion should also be sought.

¹⁸ This motif is not found in real epitaphs until much later (Richmond Alexander Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1942), pp. 65–68); it is unclear to what extent this is simply an accident of our evidence.

It would be easy to dismiss such analogies of language as unsurprising, given how commonplace the sentiments appear to be, but epitaphic language tends to the familiar and commonplace and, given the subject of the play, the audience is likely to have felt that the characters speak about Alcestis as the dead were indeed ‘spoken about’. All the characters, sympathetic and unsympathetic alike, go out of their way to say ‘nice things’ about her, and such praise already relegates Alcestis linguistically to the dead. If it is not improbable that Euripides’ play had some direct influence on later epitaphs – Alcestis herself became a model for the devoted but dead wife, and we find her cited as such in several later epitaphs¹⁹ – it seems also likely, despite the absence of confirmatory evidence, that the play reflects an already developed encomiastic epitaphic language which the audience will have recognised as such. To what extent that language was also already a standard language of inscription, or simply felt to be the words appropriate to the dead, is rather harder to decide. Pheres, whose refusal to die in his son’s place is part at least of the cause of Alcestis’ death, tells Admetus that ‘no one will deny’ that he has lost an excellent and chaste wife (ἔσθλῆς γάρ, οὐδεις ἀντερεῖ, καὶ σώφρονος / γυναικὸς ἡμάρτηκας, 615–16), and Heracles, no original thinker, echoes exactly the same words (1083); ‘no one will deny’ perhaps suggests that this was indeed the kind of language which came readily to the lips when speaking of the dead. This was the vocabulary of praise and regret which passed to the very many surviving private epitaphs of the fourth century BCE and later.

The relationship between the language of the *Alcestis* and that of inscribed epitaphs is, however, certainly not only in one direction. Alcestis’ tomb, for example, is imagined to be set just out of town and back from the main road (vv. 835–36), as so many tombs were indeed placed, and the chorus evoke a funerary epitaph for the dead queen imagined as inscribed on that tomb:

μηδὲ νεκρῶν ὡς φθιμένων χῶμα νομιζέσθω
 τύμβος σᾶς ἀλόχου, θεοῖσι δ’ ὁμοίως
 τιμάσθω, σέβας ἐμπόρων.
 καὶ τις δοχμίαν κέλευ-
 θον ἐμβαίνων τόδ’ ἐρεῖ
 Αὔτα ποτὲ προύθαν’ ἀνδρός,
 νῦν δ’ ἔστι μάκαιρα δαίμων·
 χαῖρ’, ὦ πότνι, εὖ δὲ δοίης.
 τοῖαί νιν προσερούσι φῆμαι.

Euripides, *Alcestis* 995–1005

Let not the grave of your wife be regarded as the funeral mound
 of the dead departed but let her be honoured as are the gods, an

¹⁹ See Hunter, *Greek Epitaphic Poetry*, p. 226, citing earlier bibliography.

object of reverence to the wayfarer. Someone walking a winding path past her tomb shall say, 'This woman died in the stead of her husband, and now she is a blessed divinity. Hail, Lady, and grant us your blessing!' With such words will they address her.

The verses not only seem to reflect the language of epitaphs, as they also make clear that Alcestis will be as unusual in death as in life, but they also include a 'passer-by' to utter the epitaph for Alcestis, as becomes so common in the later tradition. What is most striking, however, is how the verses avoid any explicit suggestion of an inscription to be read (aloud) by the passer-by,²⁰ though that is the picture which very likely occurred to many of the audience. This is not, I think, to avoid any suggestion of anachronism,²¹ but rather to emphasise the public *kleos* which Alcestis will enjoy; the form both replays and keeps at a suitably epic-tragic distance the mode of 'real' epitaphs.

As for Admetus, the sense that being left behind by the death of a loved one is worse than the death itself, that sadness which hangs throughout over Admetus, is well attested in funerary poetry.²² 'If you are dead, I will be no longer, for whether I live or die depends on you' (277–78), proclaims Admetus; he speaks of course with ironic truth (his life really does depend upon Alcestis), but such protestations – the notion that it is those left behind who 'are no longer' – were to find many echoes in the epitaphs for spouses of the later Greek world. What has been lurking *almost* unsaid throughout the play is finally spelled out in Admetus' speech at 935–61 (and cf. already 861–71): Alcestis is indeed better off than he is. This may be an example of the kind of counter-intuitive 'weaker argument' (ἥττων λόγος) that sophistic rhetoricians and Euripidean characters loved to pursue,²³ but it was one which was to echo down the centuries in lamentation and epitaph. Alcestis is now beyond the reach of 'pain' (ἄλγος) and 'troubles' (μόχθοι) and has died 'with a glorious reputation' (εὐκλεής, cf. 445–54), whereas Admetus' life is now a painful and miserable one of loneliness (ἐρημία, 944)²⁴ and universal

²⁰ Contrast Hecuba's bitter evocation of a written funerary epigram for the dead Astyanax at Euripides, *Trojan Women* 1181–91; there, Hecuba is imagining a 'public' memorial for someone killed in war, and there is no doubt that the audience were familiar with epitaphs of that kind.

²¹ Tragedy is quite comfortable with the idea of reading and writing in the heroic age, see e.g. P. E. Easterling, 'Anachronism in Greek Tragedy', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 105 (1985), pp. 4–6.

²² See below on the poem for Atthis.

²³ See Parker, *Euripides' Alcestis*, pp. 238–39.

²⁴ Merkelbach-Stauber adduce *Alc.* 944 on *SGO* 01/20/38.8 (Hellenistic Miletos), a widower κωκύει δ' οἶκον ἐρημον ὄρων; the motif is widespread, see e.g. *SGO* 03/07/11 μήτηρ δ' ἢ πανόδυρτος ἐρημαῖον κατὰ δῶμα κτλ. (late Hellenistic Erythrai), 05/01/43 (Hellenistic Smyrna) etc. With *Alc.* 945 (Admetus seeing his bed bereft of his wife),

Admetus; the plural verb in 258, however, links their fates in a way which merely calls attention to the gap that yawns between them.²⁶

If this exchange seems to foreground the gulf between husband and wife, the exchange of iambic speeches which follows offers Admetus the chance to 'over-compensate' by promises of lifelong celibate mourning for his soon-to-be-dead wife. When he too has died, they will be together again:

ἀλλ' οὖν ἐκεῖσε προσδόκα μ', ὅταν θάνω,
 καὶ δῶμ' ἐτοίμαζ', ὡς συνοικήσουσά μοι.
 ἐν ταῖσιν αὐταῖς γάρ μ' ἐπισκήψω κέδροις
 σοὶ τοῦσδε θεῖναι πλευρά τ' ἐκτεῖναι πέλας
 πλευροῖσι τοῖς σοῖς· μηδὲ γὰρ θανῶν ποτε
 σοῦ χωρὶς εἶην τῆς μόνης πιστῆς ἐμοί.

Euripides, *Alcestis* 363–68

But now wait for me to arrive there when I die and prepare a home where you may dwell with me. For I shall command my children here to bury me in the same coffin with you and to lay out my body next to yours. Never, even in death, may I be parted from you, the woman who alone has been faithful to me!

For Laetitia Parker, 'Admetus' vision of setting up house with Alcestis in the underworld seems quaint', and she suggests that the idea is redolent of comedy.²⁷ As Parker rightly notes, however, the idea that one will meet dead relatives in the Underworld is a conceit familiar from tragedy and it finds already some foreshadowing in the Homeric *nekuia* of *Odyssey* 11. It becomes common enough in the later epitaphic tradition: the dead will meet those of their family, especially a parent or a spouse, who have gone before and they will then be together for eternity, and this is often both symbolised and made probable by a shared tomb.²⁸ The request for Alcestis to 'make ready a home' for the (unhappy) couple to live together in the Underworld seems to be an exaggerated development of that idea, one redolent not so much of comedy as of the same idealised and conventional marital virtue extolled in the encomiastic epithets with which Alcestis is praised throughout the play and in the epitaphic tradition. Just as Alcestis is the epitome of all 'wifely virtue' (cf. *πιστῆς* in 368), so her husband imagines her in death 'getting the home ready', as wives on earth conventionally did. We do find very much later epitaphic examples of the idea of a shared 'home' in the Underworld or of a shared tomb being a continuation of the bedroom the couple shared while alive (e.g. *GVI* 236, 1718, 1719), but it is perhaps unlikely that Admetus'

²⁶ *μοι* in 268 must depend primarily on *ἔλεξας*, 'you tell to me', but it is tempting to see it also coloured by *πικράν*, 'bitter for me...'

²⁷ Parker, *Euripides' Alcestis*, p. 126.

²⁸ See Lattimore, *Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, pp. 247–50.

request here closely reflects anything that was already a standard part of ‘epitaphic discourse’. Rather, it pushes a familiar conception of (or hope or fear for) the afterlife to a new extreme. Be that as it may, in her reaction to the speech (371–73), Alcestis entirely ignores all of Admetus’ requests and promises, except for the promise never to marry again; she entrusts her children to him and tells him that he must now be their ‘mother’ (375–77), not just because she will be dead, but as confirmation of his promise that they will never have a stepmother.

None of Admetus’ promises has attracted more attention than his promise to his dying wife that he will take an image of her to his bed after her death:

σοφῆ δὲ χειρὶ τεκτόνων δέμας τὸ σὸν
 εἰκασθὲν ἐν λέκτροισιν ἐκταθήσεται,
 ᾧ προσπεσοῦμαι καὶ περιπτύσσω χέρας
 ὄνομα καλῶν σὸν τὴν φίλην ἐν ἀγκάλαις
 δόξω γυναῖκα καίπερ οὐκ ἔχων ἔχειν·
 ψυχρὰν μὲν, οἶμαι, τέρψιν, ἀλλ’ ὅμως βάρος
 ψυχῆς ἀπαντλοίην ἄν. ἐν δ’ ὄνειρασιν
 φοιτῶσά μ’ εὐφραίνοις ἄν· ἠδὲ γὰρ φίλους
 κὰν νυκτὶ λεύσσειν, ὄντιν’ ἂν παρῆ χρόνον.

Euripides, *Alcestis* 348–56

An image of you shaped by the hand of skilled craftsmen shall be laid out in my bed. I shall fall upon it, and as I embrace it and call your name I shall imagine, though I have her not, that I hold my dear wife in my arms, a cold pleasure, to be sure, but thus I shall lighten my soul’s heaviness. And perhaps you will cheer me by visiting me in dreams. For even in sleep it is sweet to see loved ones for however long we are permitted.

On the surface at least the contextual significance of this assurance is plain: Admetus will, he promises, never cease from lamentation, he will never again attend symposia, and he will never find a woman to replace Alcestis in his life and in his bed; the idea of an image in his bed is a pledge to the sincerity of this last promise.²⁹ This, however, merely opens the door to the critical maelstrom. The authors of one book say: ‘It does not take much perspicacity to doubt seriously that any woman, never mind one about to die, would be flattered, consoled, reassured, or in any way pleased to know

²⁹ See e.g. Carlo Franco, ‘Una statua per Admeto (a proposito di Eur. *Alc.* 348–54)’, *Materiali e Discussioni* 13 (1984), pp. 131–36; Maurizio Bettini, *The Portrait of the Lover* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 25, 50–53; Iakov, *Εὐριπίδης Ἀλκῆστη*, p. 1:111 (in the course of an excellent account of Admetus more generally), pp. 2:130–31.

that her husband would so readily replace her with an inanimate piece of stone.³⁰ This passage of Admetus' speech, habitually labelled 'bizarre', 'extravagant', 'disconcerting', 'macabre', 'comic', 'absurd', 'self-indulgent', 'grotesque', etc. by modern critics,³¹ is in fact a very interesting reminder of how partial and fragile is our understanding of ancient culture. Euripides gives us, apparently, no guidance as to how we are to judge Admetus' words, except for our own sense of him as a character, and one thing that can be said about modern discussion of the *Alcestis* is that there is absolutely no unanimity about this play, perhaps less than for any other surviving drama.

Modern critics who want to move beyond the identification of the bizarre and the extravagant have adopted various strategies to deal with this passage.³² One is to downplay the whole oddity, if that is what it is, by seeking to naturalise it: after all, we put photos of the dead beside our beds (some even kiss the photos, at least in movies), and the Greeks had no cameras... It may be that it is the idea of the image 'in the bed', rather than just the image itself, which many find disconcerting. In a very much later text it is reported that, as the Greeks left Troy, they 'fell upon (περιέπιπτον) Achilles' tomb and imagined that they were embracing (περιβάλλειν) Achilles' (Philostratus, *Heroicus* 51.13). Longing, in Greek πόθος, pushes us and our imaginations to seek consolatory satisfaction in many different ways.³³

The closest parallels for Admetus' plan to console himself with an image of Alcestis occur in our later sources for the story of Laodamia's grief for her

³⁰ C. A. E. Luschnig and Hanna M. Roisman, *Euripides' Alcestis* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), pp. 188–89. Some critics, however, understand Admetus to be thinking of a wooden image of his wife.

³¹ For Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 72, Admetus' promises and the business of the statue make him an 'archetypal fetishist'; Rabinowitz expands her psychoanalytic reading on pp. 81–82. A. M. Dale's note on 348–54 is a model of sensible restraint, considering what has come after her (see A. M. Dale, *Euripides: Alcestis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954). Mary C. Stieber, *Euripides and the Language of Craft* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), is an important and suggestive account which resists the temptation of simplistic descriptions of Admetus' plan. The best guide to earlier bibliography on the passage is Franco, 'Una statua per Admeto'.

³² Nearly a century ago H. J. Rose, 'Euripides, *Alcestis* 340ff.', *Classical Review*, 41.2 (1927), p. 58, drew attention in the context of the *Alcestis* to a newspaper report that a 'Hungarian of good family' was refused marriage 'by the parents of a remarkably beautiful Jewess', and so he had 'a lifelike wax figure of her made, and for some time kept it in his flat and talked to it, until he was induced to take it with him into an asylum'.

³³ See further below. In one version of the Protesilaos story reported by Eustathius, Protesilaos returned from the dead to find his wife 'embracing (περικειμένην) a statue of him' (*Hom.* 325.25).

Thessalian husband Protesilaos, the first Greek to be killed at Troy.³⁴ In most versions, Laodamia created a statue of her dead husband and Protesilaos was also granted leave briefly to return to her from the Underworld. In one of his *Dialogues of the Dead*, Lucian has Protesilaos reminding Pluto in the Underworld that precedents for what he is asking existed; namely, Orpheus' beloved Eurydice and 'my fellow Thessalian Alcestis, whom you sent back as a favour to Heracles' (*Dial. Mort.* 28.3). Whether or not Lucian has Euripides' *Alcestis* in mind here, the two stories are regularly cited together in later antiquity. We know that Euripides dramatised some version of the story in his *Protesilaos* (of uncertain date), though most of what we can conjecture about the plot is fragile at every point.³⁵ It is, however, likely enough that the play used both Laodamia's creation of a statue of her dead husband (bronze, according to Hyginus, *Fab.* 104, but wax in Ovid, *Heroides* 13.151–58), which she may have slept with and/or treated with cult honours, and also his brief return from the dead, guided by Hermes; Laodamia may have killed herself when Protesilaos was forced to return to the Underworld.

If in the *Alcestis* Euripides was indeed thinking of this other Thessalian story, a number of questions arise. How familiar was that story (Laodamia's statue *might* have been Euripides' invention) and how many of the audience will have made the connection? It is obviously tempting to think that Euripides makes his Admetus evoke a recent Euripidean play, but we simply do not have any clear indication as to the date of the *Protesilaos*.³⁶ If, however, we put the question of date to one side, we may ask what an evocation of the story of Protesilaos and Laodamia would 'do for' the *Alcestis*. We can hardly say, I think, as many modern critics seem to imply, that the Laodamia parallel 'explains' Admetus' promise to Alcestis,

³⁴ The parallels were first discussed (as far as I know) by Ulrich von Wilamowitz, *Griechische Tragödien. IX. Euripides Alkestis*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Weidmann, 1920), p. 29 n. 1. Wilamowitz notes that modern readers must find this motif 'befremdend und anstößig', but he tries to downplay its significance by noting that Admetus only mentions it briefly ('beiläufig') and merely as an example of the kind of posthumous cult which he will establish for Alcestis. Lucian names 'Alcestis and Protesilaos the Thessalians' among those who have returned from the Underworld (*On grief* 5).

³⁵ For the reconstruction of the *Protesilaos*, Maximilian Mayer, 'Der Protesilaos des Euripides', *Hermes*, 20 (1885), pp. 101–43, remains fundamental; Christopher Collard and Martin Cropp, *Euripides, Fragments. Oedipus-Chrysisippus, Other Fragments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 106–09, offer a very helpful summary, and see also Hans Oranje, 'Euripides' Protesilaos: P. Oxy. 3214, 10–14', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 37 (1980), pp. 169–72; Parker, *Euripides' Alcestis, on Alcestis* 348–54.

³⁶ The very few surviving trimeters from the *Protesilaos* point to a relatively early date, by a standard metrical criterion for the relative dating of Euripidean plays, but there are too few of them for any firm conclusion.

even with the 'this is just what Thessalians do' inference. The Laodamia-parallel, if that is what it is, by itself explains very little, but we will see that some versions of it may indeed help us to understand what is important in Admetus' promise.

The image of Alcestis' δέμας, 'body', will be fashioned by the 'skilful hands of craftsmen (τεκτόνων)'.³⁷ The noun leaves open the nature of the craftsmen whom Admetus imagines and hence the material from which the image will be made. Most modern critics imagine (without argument) a stone (perhaps marble) image, such as the *korai* of archaic and early classical funerary art. Stone or marble, suggesting a likeness between the image and the unyielding stone of a funeral *stēlē*, would give a further point to 'cold pleasure' (ψυχρὸν ... τέρψιν) in 353, although – for what it is worth – the term τέκτων itself more naturally suggests a wooden image.³⁸ Perhaps indeed we are not to push too hard at what Admetus actually has in mind; what matters is what the promise represents to his wife, not the actual details of construction. On the other hand, ἐκταθήσεται, 'will be laid out' (349), is charged in the context. Less than 20 verses later (366), Admetus will use it again of how he will instruct his children to 'lay out' his corpse in the same coffin in which Alcestis will lie, and the verb is used specifically of what is done to corpses at *Hippolytus* 786 and 789. The verb is another way in which the fashioned image is likened to the dead wife herself.³⁹ Moreover, Admetus says merely 'your form ...', or perhaps 'Your form made by likeness through the skilful hands of craftsmen ...'; he does not say 'I will have an image of you made ...', and the awkwardness of the expression in 348–49 precisely betrays a struggle to avoid an explicit term for an 'image'. What he will have in his bed is, rather, the 'body' or 'form' of Alcestis 'made like', not *just* a stone image.

Death is suggested by the 'cold pleasure' (ψυχρὸν ... τέρψιν) in 353,⁴⁰ but also, I suggest, by ψυχρὸν ... ψυχῆς at the head of successive trimeters (353–54). The quasi-pun, which may of course reflect real cultural patterns reflected in such popular etymology,⁴¹ occurs also in another very suggestive

³⁷ See *Andromeda* fr. 125. 2–4 K, ... παρθένου τ' εἰκό τινα | ... σοφῆς ἄγαλμα χειρός.

³⁸ See Eur. fr. 223.124, 988k, LSJ s.v. Andreas Markantonatos, *Euripides' Alcestis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 77, assumes that Admetus' image will be of wood, but offers no reason for the assumption.

³⁹ See e.g. Stieber, *Euripides*, p. 166; Iakov, *Εὐριπίδης Ἀλκηστη*, p. 2:132. On the idea of the image as being itself 'part of' the person it represents or substitutes for, see Bettini, *Portrait of the Lover*, pp. 45–48.

⁴⁰ In *GVI* 2002.7–8 (late Hellenistic, perhaps from Corcyra), a passer-by expresses the sadness of the parents of the deceased, to whom their son left 'grief and the cold memorial of a tomb which does not speak' (ἄλγεα καὶ κωφοῦ ψυχρὸν ἄγαλμα τάφου).

⁴¹ See Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 310, 312; for a suggestive attempt to trace out the links in Homer between ψυχή and ψυχρὸν and related words, see Michael Clarke, *Flesh and Spirit in*

context. There are a number of mystical or magical texts which have been found associated with burials all over the Greek world, notably in the west (southern Italy and Sicily), in northern Greece and in Crete, which seem to offer the initiated dead advice for the Underworld or act as a kind of passport into a better afterlife. Collectively, these texts are known as ‘Gold Leaves’, because they are very often precisely inscribed on fragile and thin gold leaf which was placed, for example, in the dead person’s mouth; they are regularly associated with ‘Orphic’ or ‘Dionysiac’ initiatory cult. On one of the best known such ‘leaves’, from southern Italy (c. 400 BCE), the same word-play occurs:

Μναμοσύνας τόδε ἔργον. ἐπεὶ ἂν μέλλησι θανεῖσθαι
 εἰς Αἶδαο δόμους εὐήρεας, ἔστ’ ἐπὶ δεξιᾷ κρήνα,
 πᾶρ δ’ αὐτὰν ἔστακυῖα λευκὰ κυπάρισσος·
 ἔνθα κατερχόμεναι ψυχαὶ νεκύων ψύχονται.

Orphicorum Fragmenta 474.1–4 Bernabé⁴²

This is the work of Memory. When [the initiate] is about to die and go down to the well-built house of Hades, on the right there is a spring, by which stands a white cypress. Descending there, the souls of the dead seek cooling refreshment.

There is, of course, nothing ‘Orphic’ about Admetus’ promise to Alcestis, despite the fact that he immediately follows it by regret that he does not have the powers of an Orpheus to descend alive to the Underworld (357–62), but the ‘jingle’ reinforces the ambiguity of the form (image or ‘corpse’?) which Admetus imagines in his bed.

The lines, then, are blurred between the dead Alcestis and the image of her which will lie in Admetus’ bed. This is, we might think, hardly surprising, given the emotional charge which images of the beloved dead can still carry, but it also links this passage to some of the most potent ancient ideas about representations in images, both of loved ones and of the dead. In Socrates’ ‘palinode’ in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, for example, we hear how the lover is reminded of the eternal beauty he has previously seen when he sees ‘a godlike face or some form of body which imitates beauty well’ and then, after shuddering (ἔφριξε, a verb commonly used of religious awe), ‘reveres (σέβεται) it as a god as he looks upon it, and if he did not fear a reputation for utter madness, he would sacrifice to his beloved boy as to an image (ἄγάλματι) and a god’ (251a). The idea recurs at 252d–e where the lover is said to treat his beloved ‘as his own god, and he fashions and adorns

the Songs of Homer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 144–47. That ψυχῆς in 354 refers to Admetus’ ψυχή, not to that of Alcestis, does not, I think, undermine the suggestion made here.

⁴² I pass over textual uncertainties which do not affect the simple point being made.

him like a statue (οἷον ἄγλαμα τεκταίνεται τε καὶ κατακοσμεῖ), so as to honour him and celebrate his rites'. Plato here is an early witness to the erotic discourse of art with which we are so familiar from later antiquity and which is perhaps best known from Ovid's famous narrative of Pygmalion.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato was either drawing upon or anticipating and founding a literary discourse about, not just the erotics of statues, but also about their ontological status, poised (like *Alcestis* herself) between life and non-life. Another way in which modern critics have sought to understand Admetus' plan for a statue of *Alcestis* in his bed is by incorporating it within a rich set of ideas about artistic images in Greek religion and cult and, in particular, how images emblematised the absent presence of what they 'represent'.⁴³ The language which Admetus uses makes the image in his bed part-corpse of the 'real' *Alcestis* and part-image of her. He does not just whisper sweet nothings in her ear, but he addresses the statue as 'Alcestis' (*Alc.* 351), he 'calls her by her name'. Whether the image would have answered we will never know, but it is at least tempting to read some later dialogues between a husband and his dead wife, inscribed on the wife's tomb, as evocations of such pillow-talk with the dead, perhaps under the influence of this passage of the *Alcestis*. Consider, for example, the second stanza of a poem from late Hellenistic Knidos:⁴⁴

Ἀτθίς, ἔμοι ζήσασα καὶ εἰς ἐμὲ πνεῦμα λιποῦσα,
ὡς πάρος εὐφροσύνης νῦν δακρῶν πρόφασι,
ἀγνά, πουλυγόητε, τί πένθιμον ὕπνον ιαύεις,
ἀνδρὸς ἀπὸ στέρνων οὔποτε θεῖσα κάρα,
Θεῖον ἐρημώσασα τὸν οὐκέτι; σοὶ γὰρ ἐς Ἄϊδαν
ἦλθον ὁμοῦ ζωᾶς ἐλπίδες ἀμετέρας.

SGO 01/01/07 = IK 41.303 = GVI 1874, vv. 5–10

Atthis, who lived for me and left your breath behind in me, as once you brought me joy now it is tears, faithful, much lamented wife, why do you sleep the sleep of grief? Before, you never moved your head from your husband's breast. You have abandoned Theios who cannot go on: with you the hopes for our common life have gone down to Hades.

⁴³ Particularly important are Bettini, *Portrait of the Lover*, esp. pp. 18–28 for the *Alcestis*, and Deborah T. Steiner, *Images in Mind. Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); both followed in the wake of Vernant, *Myth and Thought*, pp. 308–11; Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), chap. 10. That neither Bettini nor Steiner appears anywhere in Parker's commentary on the *Alcestis* is very remarkable.

⁴⁴ For discussion and bibliography of this poem, see Hunter, *Greek Epitaphic Poetry*, pp. 205–12.

Such desperation takes on, I think, a remarkable new colour if we imagine it whispered into the ear of a statue lying in the widower's bed. In this poem the dead does indeed answer:

οὐκ ἔπιον Λήθης Αἰδωνίδος ἔσχατον ὕδωρ,
 ὡς σε παρηγορίην κἀν φθιμένοισιν ἔχω,
 Θεῖε, πλέον δύστηνε, γάμων ὅτι τῶν ἀμιάντων
 νοσοφισθεῖς κλαίεις χηροσύνην θαλάμων.

SGO 01/01/07 = IK 41.303 = GVI 1874, vv. 11–14

I did not drink the final water of Lethe in the Underworld, so that, even among the dead, I might have you as my consolation, Theios, who are more wretched (than I), because you weep for the emptiness of your chamber, having been robbed of an unstained marriage.

The words which the widower (or his poet) put into the dead wife's mouth allow him to believe that he is remembered – she still uses his name – and confirm his overwhelming sense that he is somehow worse off, 'more wretched', than she is. This too, as in the *Alcestis*, may be a 'cold pleasure', but the consolation which the dead wife is made to claim is in reality some consolation for the widower.

The name of the dead is important; it too, like an image, can stand-in for, as well as evoke, the person who is gone.⁴⁵ In a famous epigram of the second half of the sixth century BCE, a rare case where we have the image as well as the poem which accompanied it, the naming of the dead and of the image is central:⁴⁶

σῆμα Φρασικλείας. κούρη κεκλήσομαι αἰεῖ,
 ἀντὶ γάμου παρὰ θεῶν τοῦτο λαχοῦσ' ὄνομα.

CEG 24 = GVI 68

This is the tomb of Phrasikleia. I shall forever be called a maiden, as I have received this name from the gods in place of marriage.

In the *Cratylus*, Socrates conjures up the possibility of a 'perfect' image and the naming-problem that that would cause:

Would there be two things, Cratylus and the image (εἰκόν) of
 Cratylus, if some god should not merely imitate your colour and

⁴⁵ See Carlo Brillante, 'Metamorfosi di un'immagine: le statue animate e il sogno', in *Il sogno in Grecia*, ed. by G. Guidorizzi (Rome: Laterza, 1988), pp. 29, 33 n. 47; Bettini, *Portrait of the Lover*, pp. 23–24. Helmut Häusle, *Einfache und frühe Formen des griechischen Epigramms* (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1979), pp. 109–13, discusses the significance of the name of the dead standing alone on early inscribed epitaphs.

⁴⁶ For discussion and bibliography of this poem, see Hunter, *Greek Epitaphic Poetry*, pp. 170–71.

form, as painters do, but should also make all the inner parts like yours, should reproduce the same flexibility and warmth, should put into them motion, life, and intellect, such as exist in you, and in short, should place beside you a duplicate of all your qualities? Would there be in such an event Cratylus and an image of Cratylus, or two Cratyluses?

Plato, *Cratylus* 432b–c (trans. by Fowler)

An *eikōn* that reproduced *all* the features of its model would no longer be an *eikōn*, but would deserve to be called by the name of the model as much as the model itself did.⁴⁷ The action of the god strikingly foreshadows what Venus actually does to Pygmalion's statue, though (like Pandora) it has no actual 'model', except perhaps the imaginary form of a beautiful woman. For Admetus, the image both is and is not 'Alcestis'.⁴⁸

The image is *not* Alcestis because, apparently, Admetus will know that what he has in his arms is just an image;⁴⁹ the 'real' one will visit him in nocturnal dreams (354–56). It may, of course, be that one of the purposes of the image is precisely to make it much more likely that the dead Alcestis will come to him in his dreams; Admetus is, if you like, stacking the odds in favour of such erotic dreams by embracing the image as he falls asleep. We do not have to appeal to the very familiar link in ancient (and modern) culture between dreams and artistic images to understand that. Admetus thus seems to be at least one step ahead of Theocritus' young Cyclops who apparently does not understand that his beloved Galatea's nocturnal visits are in fact simply his dreams of her (11.22–24).⁵⁰ What, however, does Admetus mean by his claim that, while embracing the image of his dead wife, 'I shall seem (δόξω) to have my dear wife in my arms, though I do not have her' (351–52)? The habitual 'parallel' which commentators cite are the verses from the *Helen* to which I have already referred, where Helen describes Paris after the substitution of the *eidōlon*:

⁴⁷ On this passage, see David Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 46 n. 44; Steiner, *Images in Mind*, pp. 68–74; both Sedley and Steiner compare the 'two Helens problem', which Euripides famously dramatised. See further below.

⁴⁸ For these ideas taken in other directions, see Kiki Gounaridou, *Euripides and Alcestis* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), pp. 27–37; for Pandora as a 'model' for Admetus' statue of Alcestis, see e.g. Karen Bassi, 'The Actor as Actress in Euripides' *Alcestis*', in *Women in Theatre*, Themes in Drama 11, ed. by J. Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 24–25; Dolores O'Higgins, 'Above Rubies: Admetus' Perfect Wife', *Arethusa*, 26.1 (1993), pp. 87–90.

⁴⁹ See in general Steiner, *Images in Mind*, pp. 21–22.

⁵⁰ Both Admetus (355) and the Cyclops (11.22) use φοιτᾶν of the recurrent dream (see Pl. *Phaedo* 60e4); the verb can have a sexual resonance (LSJ s.v. 3), and this can hardly be ruled out in either passage.

καὶ δοκεῖ μ' ἔχειν,
κενήν δόκησιν, οὐκ ἔχων.

Euripides, *Helen* 35–36

He imagines—vain imagination—that he has me, though he does not.

In fact, however, there is a fundamental difference in the two cases which the apparent similarity of wording has tended to erase in critical discussion. There is, as far as I am aware, no suggestion in any of the accounts of the ‘phantom’ Helen from Stesichorus onwards that Paris realised that the woman in his arms and his bed was not ‘Helen’; Paris’ ‘belief’ was, according to Helen, an empty one. Paris’ situation is very different indeed from that of Admetus.

One approach to vv. 351–52 is through ideas of the deception of art. In a famous anecdote, the poet and wise man Simonides responded to someone who asked him why the Thessalians were the one people he could not deceive that Thessalians were too stupid to be taken in by him.⁵¹ Are we, then, to understand that Admetus is one Thessalian who is not too stupid *not* to allow himself to be deceived by art in the right way, someone who both knows and (briefly) does not know what he holds in his arms? The sophist and rhetorician Gorgias, a contemporary of Euripides, is reported as having described tragedy as ‘a deception in which the deceiver is more just than one who does not deceive and the one who is deceived is wiser than the one who is not deceived’ (fr. 23 D-K = D35 L-M), and Admetus here seems to exemplify that ‘wisdom’ with respect to visual rather than verbal artefacts. The ‘cold pleasure’ he will receive is not merely some form of emotional and sexual release, but it is also the pleasure of the omnipresent but differentially suppressed consciousness of the power of artistic skill.⁵² Admetus will both know and not know, just as what he holds in his arms will both be and not be ‘Alcestis’.

The story of Protesilaos and Laodameia (see above) may illustrate some of what is important here. In different versions of the story, Laodameia shares her bed with her husband returned from the dead or with an image

⁵¹ See Plutarch, *Mor.* 15d, with Richard Hunter and Donald Russell, eds, *Plutarch: How to Study Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 78; Steiner, *Images in Mind*, p. 50. Contrast Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p. 81: ‘How could the statue comfort Admetos if he remained aware that it was a statue? In fact, he must forget, or pretend to forget, that it originated in his own desires in order for it to satisfy those desires.’ This seems to me untrue regarding the distinction between the image and his wife that Admetus clearly makes.

⁵² On figures such as Admetus and Pygmalion as model ‘viewers’ of art, see esp. Jaś Elsner, ‘Visual Mimesis and the Myth of the Real: Ovid’s Pygmalion as Viewer’, *Ramus*, 20.2 (1991), pp. 154–68.

of him which she has had made or he visits her at night in dreams, or various combinations of these possibilities may appear together.⁵³ What matters most perhaps is how these different motifs function analogously within the narratives, not which is the 'original' (or indeed the Euripidean) motif. Both an image of the dead husband or a dream of him 'is' and 'is not' Protesilaos, as also is true of the version in which Protesilaos returns briefly from the Underworld. Dreams and images are two ways in which the dead were imagined and contact with them was preserved, and such contact might include sexual relations. Some of the same motifs, but put to very different uses, occur in the chorus' account in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* of Menelaos' longing for the absent Helen:⁵⁴

πόθωι δ' ὑπερποντίας
 φάσμα δόξει δόμων ἀνάσσειν· 415
 εὐμόρφων δὲ κολοσσῶν
 ἔχθεται χάρις ἀνδρί,
 ὀμμάτων δ' ἐν ἀχηνίαις
 ἔρρει πᾶσ' Ἀφροδίτα.

ὄνειρόφαντοι δὲ πενθήμονες 422
 πάρεισι δόξαι φέρου-
 σαι χάριν ματαίαν·

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 414–22

because of his longing for her who is beyond the sea, a phantom will seem to rule the house. The charm of beautiful statues has become hateful to the husband: because they lack eyes, all their loveliness goes for nothing. Mournful imaginings, seen in dreams, present themselves, bringing an empty delight ... (trans. by A. Sommerstein)

Helen is 'beyond the seas' rather than dead, but Greek uses πόθος, 'longing', both for loved ones who are dead and for those, including those for whom

⁵³ One source, Eustathius, *Hom.* 325.30–31, seems to suggest that Laodamia continued to sleep with her husband after his death, 'preferring intercourse with the dead man to relations with the living', and that she died 'of desire'. It is, however, very unlikely that she had the corpse itself, given that he died at Troy; something is missing here from the text or from our interpretation of it, see Mayer, 'Der Protesilaos', pp. 106–07.

⁵⁴ The passage and its difficulties have been very much discussed. I will not add to that discussion here, given the simple point I wish to make. For an excellent introduction to the problems of the passage, see Steiner, *Images in Mind*, pp. 190–94, and cf. also Tom Phillips, 'Vigilance to the Point of Magic', in *The Imagination of the Mind in Classical Athens*, ed. by E. Clifford and X. Buxton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024), pp. 253–70 at pp. 261–65.

we feel sexual desire, who are absent (but presumed alive). The *χάρις ματαία*, ‘empty delight’, which images and dreams bring, has much in common with the *ψυχρὰ τέρψις*, ‘cold pleasure’, which the lifeless image of Alcestis will offer to Admetus. Menelaos’ ‘imaginings’ (*δόξαι*), Paris’ ‘vain imagining’ (*δόκησις*), and Admetus’ foreshadowed ‘imagining’ (*δόξω*) point to the fact that it is our own emotional projection which determines the kinds of ‘pleasure’ with which we comfort and/or seek to deceive our emptiness.

One of our principal sources for the story of Protesilaos and Laodameia, Eustathius in his voluminous commentary (twelfth century CE) on the verses of the *Iliad* (2.698–702) which were the foundation for all later versions of the story, rationalises that it was ‘reasonable, understandable’ (*εϊκός*) that someone as ‘husband-loving’ (*φίλανδρος*) as Laodameia should make an image of her husband and ‘seem to be/think that she was sleeping with him even when he was dead’ (*συνεῖναι δοκούσης αὐτῷ καὶ θανόντι*, *Hom.* 325.25–32 = I p. 507.4–11 Van der Valk). If *δόξω* in Admetus’ promise to his wife is ambiguous (see above), then Eustathius’ *δοκούσης* of Laodameia may be equally so. Does *δοκούσης* refer to *her* ‘imaginings’ as she embraced the image or to what she was thought by others to be doing, as in Hyginus’ account in which a servant mistook the statue of Protesilaos for an adulterous lover (*Fab.* 104)? Eustathius probably in fact means the former, as he uses the story of Laodameia as an illustration of what happens to those who are gripped by ‘immoderate’ desire, but the apparently simple verb *δοκεῖν* again catches the crucial uncertainty of how we represent our interactions with images of the dead: for all their differences, ‘believing’, ‘imagining’, and ‘seeming’ bleed into each other in such fraught situations. Eustathius’ rationalising aetiology for the story of Laodameia’s alleged necrophilia lays out a tantalising set of cultural and linguistic problems which revolve around the use of images. Was Admetus’ promise to his wife also *εϊκός*, ‘reasonable, as one might have expected’? What, after all, is important is not the making of an image of the beloved *per se*, but how the image is then used in an attempt to cope with utter desolation.

The *Alcestis* thus emerges as a remarkable representation and imagining, not just of the very process of dying, but also of the mourning of those left behind and of the ways in which grief and longing are expressed and (sometimes) contained. By evoking the language of epitaphs inscribed on stone, for example, the *Alcestis* fills in the gaps and silences of emotion and experience to which those brief records of past lives point so achingly. The dramatisation of death, however, above all through the exchanges between Alcestis and Admetus, also suggests the ‘theatricality’ of the language and ideas through which the processes of death and mourning are imagined; not entirely unlike drama itself, these processes involve powerful elements of willing (and comforting) deception. If the link between mourning, both collective and individual, and Attic tragedy is very familiar, the *Alcestis*

extends this concern to all of the strategies by which the challenge of death is (to be) confronted.

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Chapter 2

The Mesopotamians' Perception of Death in Metaphor

Dina Katz

'In my bedroom Death resides.'
(EG XI:245)

Introduction

The Old Babylonian myth of Atrahasis describes the creation of man from a mixture of clay¹ with the flesh and blood of the god We, who was executed for rebellion against the great gods.² His immortal divine remains were designated for the creation of a ghost, the everlasting memory of the events that led to the creation of mankind. The ghost is the quintessence of the afterlife. The efficacious divine matter also instilled in the ghost some power over the lives of his living kinsmen. During the lifetime, the divine matter is the fabric of the human spirit, the source of the human intellectual and emotional properties. The intrinsic immortality of the executed god kept the intellectual and emotional properties of the human spirit intact throughout the afterlife. The indestructible human spirit interlaces the two major existential phases into a linear sequence: life and afterlife, separated by dying, a short transitional phase. During this intermediary phase, funerary rituals put into motion the migration of the spirit from the corpse to the realm of death, where it will survive in an ethereal mode as a ghost. The transition took place in the sealed grave, hidden from human eyes. The

¹ The sources are texts and archaeological finds from Babylonia and Assyria, from mid-third to mid-first millennium BCE.

² Text editions: Wilfred G. Lambert and Alan R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); English translation: Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd edn (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), pp. 227–77. Style: *italics*: Akkadian words; regular: Sumerian words; capitalised regular: Sumerian logogram in Akkadian text.

funerary ritual was the prelude to the cult of the dead, the continual care for the ghost by and within his family unit.

After the last breath, the spirit escapes the human visual and aural senses. Except for visions in dreams and necromancy, there is no reciprocal communication with it. Death and beyond are mysterious and are a source of uncertainty, fears, and speculations, as noted in the editors' Introduction to this volume. The attitude towards death was conceptualised by the perilous journey of Gilgamesh to Utanapišti, the man who gained eternal life after the flood. After Gilgamesh experienced the passing of his closest friend Enkidu, the fear of death engulfed him: 'Shall I not die like Enkidu?' (GE IX:3).³ But Utanapišti could only emphasise that death is unknown: 'No one sees the face of death, no one hears the voice of death, although savage death is the one who hacks man down. [...] The abducted and the dead, how alike they are. They cannot draw the picture of death. The dead do not greet man in the land.'⁴ The subtext emphasises that man cannot oppose death, the unknown foe, but rather man should accept it. Indeed, by the end of the journey, Gilgamesh learned to accept his mortality. He acknowledged the value of routine everyday life, his own family, and community, who keep man's name alive through offspring and contribution to society. Gilgamesh is but a metaphor for the attitude of the ancient Mesopotamian to death and life.

The speculation that death was not the end of life had been actualised in burial practices long before the historical periods.⁵ The imageries of death, dying, and the netherworld are imprinted by the burial practices and the invisible mysterious reality thereafter.

The perception of death, the afterlife, and the netherworld is better conveyed in words than in images. Words are, therefore, our primary means of exploration, with emphasis on metaphors. The research material comprises of cuneiform texts of various genres, mostly literary texts, since the middle of the third millennium throughout the first millennium BC. But Mesopotamian literary texts of all genres were transmitted through scribal

³ A list of abbreviations is provided at the end of this chapter.

⁴ Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 697, ll. 305–07, 316–18.

⁵ Ritualised burials date from the Middle-Palaeolithic, mostly since *c.* 50,000 BCE. Supposedly few early examples from the caves of Qafzeh, Skhul, and Tinsmet in Israel and Shanidar in Iraq date to *c.* 100,000 BCE: e.g. Bernard Vandermeersch and Ofer Bar Yosef, 'The Paleolithic Burials at Qafzeh Cave, Israel', *Paleo, Revue d'archéologie préhistorique*, 30.1 (2019), pp. 264–67. For the date of Qafzeh XVII, see Erella Hovers, *The Lithic Assemblages of Qafzeh Cave*, Human Evolution Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 270. Against this early date, see Robert H. Gargett, 'Middle Palaeolithic Burial Is not a Dead Issue', *Journal of Human Evolution*, 37.1 (1999), pp. 27–90.

schools, usually resulting in some variations. Texts were updated when and where it deemed necessary.⁶ Highly poetic metaphors are rare, which seems to reflect the personal attitude and the experience of the occasional redactor. The believers perceived the fundamentally imaginary discourse as actual reality. This calls for caution regarding the definition of 'metaphor'. In the last decades the definition of metaphor was subject to a refining process. Generally speaking, according to the classical theory, metaphor is a figure of speech, novel poetic expression, distinct from literal conventional language, associated with literary figurative imagery. Contemporary metaphor theory emanated from the field of cognitive linguistics. Its proponents argue that poetic metaphorical expression is governed not by language but by thought. It is 'the way we conceptualise one mental domain in terms of another'.⁷ Indeed, a great deal of our conventional language consists of metaphor, though it is not poetic as e.g. 'dead-end street' or 'his plate is full'. Though I agree with the basic premise of the contemporary theory of metaphor, it seems to me that the classic definition of metaphor is still valid occasionally. In this essay I choose to apply both definitions in the reading of the textual sources.

The imagery of death, dying, and the netherworld consists mostly of conceptual metaphors, which probably functioned as euphemisms more than for poetic embellishment. The sources are organised according to the vocabulary that was used. Some of the ancient Mesopotamian vocabulary is in use today, e.g. 'depart', 'lie', and 'rest'. Evading explicit expression benefits the deceased, whose emotional and cognitive faculties, as they believed, remained intact. Euphemisms are privileged also by the bereaved, who were confronted with death and had to come to terms with the new reality.

Not surprisingly, the imagery is usually close to the actual reality. The eye of the mind saw what the eye of the flesh did. The written sources show that the appearances of the corpse, the image of the open or sealed grave, and the social organisation of the city-state were the raw material. The perception that the ancient Mesopotamian spun from it is a mirror image of life itself, in a remote and inaccessible place beyond the horizon.

Death and Dying

Death was universally accepted as an integral part of being human: 'When the gods created mankind, for mankind they established death, life

⁶ Authorship was usually anonymous. In very few occasions, scribes added their names to their composition, though never straightforwardly. Colophons bear the name of the copyist.

⁷ G. Lakoff, 'The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor', in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. by A. Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1993), p. 203.

they kept for themselves.⁸ One's date of death, the Babylonians believed, was determined at birth. Thus, the shadow of death accompanied man throughout lifetime, stirring emotions, mostly of fear and grief. The verbal expressions of the image of death vary from emotionally tinted metaphors to unambiguous terms.

Death

A major source for the imagery of death and netherworld are the lamentations over the young dying gods, whose death metaphorised the changing agricultural seasons. It was commemorated in seasonal cults. Until the second millennium several local incarnations of young dying gods represented various agricultural domains. The lamentations describe their death by the hand of netherworld agents and their journey to the netherworld. Since the second millennium, the images of the local dying gods merged together in the shepherd god Dumuzi. The Sumerian wails over him are usually almost literal: 'lives no more' (til 'live'), 'How you lie down, how the ewe (and) its lamb sleep' (nú 'to lie', u-ku 'to sleep'), 'who eats no more ... who drinks no more'.⁹ The poetic feeling of these laments was achieved by other rhetoric means. An exception is 'In the Steppe in the Early Grass', a long cultic lament in Sumerian and Akkadian. It commemorates the death of different dying gods; it was transmitted in writing for over 2,000 years. A short passage describes the dead in conceptual metaphors that highlight the vegetational aspect of the god. Envisioned as these trees, the god is the south Mesopotamian fauna, domesticated and wild:

My Tamarisk which will never drink water in its garden bed
Whose top formed no foliage in the steppe;
My Poplar which will never empty its canal
My Poplar torn out at its roots
My wine which will never drink water in its garden bed.¹⁰

The Akkadian *mūtu* literally means 'death'. In the epic of Gilgamesh a direct address attained metaphoric sense through personification,¹¹ objectification of death, and in the combination of 'death' with verbs as qualifiers.

⁸ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 279, iii:3–5.

⁹ Mark E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 2 vols (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1988), pp. 90–92.

¹⁰ Cohen, *Canonical Lamentations*, p. 691, 14–18.

¹¹ Irene Sibbing-Planholt, 'Visible Death and Audible Distress: The Personification of Death (*Mūtu*) and Associated Emotions as Inherent Conditions of Life in Akkadian Sources', in *The Expression of Emotions in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, ed. by S. Hsu and J. Llop Radua (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 225–89.

Gilgamesh pictured death (*mūtu*) lurking as a thief, waiting for the right moment to snatch the person: 'The Thief has taken hold of my flesh. In my bedroom Death resides, wherever I may look there is Death.'¹² An elegy over an Assyrian woman who died in labour draws on the same image: 'Death creeped stealthily into my bedroom. It brought me out of my home, separated me from my husband, and set my feet toward a territory from which I shall not return.'¹³ Old Babylonian letters employ the same image as metaphor: 'May death carry me off, away from you!' and another: 'Death, the lord of mankind, has carried his son away' (AbB 14, 25:6–7 and 83:16–18 respectively). The Assyrian king Assurbanipal (669–631 BCE) describes the premature death of his enemy, the Elmite king Urtaku: 'Death called him on a day that was not his lot' (RINAP 5, 06 v:73–78 + 07 v:17–21). In Sumerian, the verb *dab₅*, 'to seize' and 'to take away', alludes to the myth of Dumuzi's death by the agents of the netherworld. It is attested in laments over him: 'her spouse who was seized'.¹⁴ The image of Dumuzi's death was applied to Urnamma, the king of Ur, who in life has been ritually identified with Dumuzi: 'The good shepherd was caught (*dab₅*)' (ETCSL 2.4.1.1:21).

Enkidu, the dear friend of Gilgamesh, saw his own death in a dream as a monstrous young man his head like a bird of prey, with lion's paws and claws like an eagle's talons. The horrifying paws and claws symbolise the grip of death. Death turned Enkidu into a dove, which is a symbol of mourning.¹⁵ Utanapišī, who survived the flood and gained eternal life, asserts that, although man meets death regularly in daily life, it remains unknown: 'No one ever sees Death, no one sees the face of Death, no one hears the voice of Death, (although) angry Death is the one who hacks man down.'¹⁶

Personification turns death into an animated entity and reduces it to the capacity of human imagination. In personified form, man could deal intellectually with death and think up strategies to postpone it. Incantations and rituals had been used against looming death as, for example, the ritual that transferred imminent death from the terminally ill to a substitute who will die instead of him.¹⁷

¹² George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 719, 244–46.

¹³ Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), no. 15, rev. 6–9.

¹⁴ Mark E. Cohen, *Sumerian Hymnology: The Eršemma*, HUCA Suppl. 2 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College, 1981), p. 73; Eršemma 97:10. Also pp. 84 (Eršemma 88:1–3) and 87 (Eršemma 165:1).

¹⁵ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 643, 168–82.

¹⁶ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 697, 304–07.

¹⁷ Dina Katz, "'His Wind Is Released" – The Emergence of the Ghost. Ritual of Passage in Mesopotamia', in *Life, Death and Coming of Age in Antiquity: Individual Rites*

Objectified, death is an attribute of Huwawa, the monster who guarded the cedar forest: ‘Huwawa, his voice is the deluge, his speech is fire, his breath is death.’¹⁸ In the standard Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh epic: ‘White cloud was turned to black, death was raining on them like mist.’¹⁹

Lot, Fate – Šimtu, Death, Dying, to Die

The Akkadian *šimtu* is a concept that denotes predetermined fate, decreed by the gods to define the essence of things.²⁰ Ultimately, *šimtu* is the mechanism that delineates and governs the world order through each and all its components: divine, human, and natural.²¹ On the human level, *šimtu* is translated as ‘predetermined fate’, ‘lot’. Configuring the essence of human life, ‘fate’ became a common expression for ‘death’ as the last moment in earthly life. The concept *šimtu* reveals that the ancient Mesopotamian mindset had been blind to coincidences. Human life from birth to death was written down in the book of the gods. Death became definitive when man entered the gates of the netherworld. This is important because supplications and incantations tend to describe the severely ill as dead. But dying is a process that the ancient Mesopotamians deemed could be stopped or reversed. At the gate of the netherworld, death was imminent but if one were still alive then his life could be saved. An incantation against evil spirits that brought a random victim to the gate of the netherworld asserts that, ‘Since Nin-geštinana the great scribe of the Arali is not there, he will not enter the foot of the “mountain”, he will not cross the path of the netherworld.’²² This assertion is, of course, a performative utterance, which means that the scribe who holds the list of spirits is not expecting a newcomer, and so the man is saved. Considering that the notion of paradise and hell is not attested in cuneiform texts, in my view, the epithet ‘judge of the dead’, given to Šamaš the god of justice, refers to this situation.²³

of Passage in the Ancient Near East and Adjacent Regions, ed. by A. Mouton et al. (Leiden: NINO, 2014), pp. 422–23. The substitute was, normally, an animal. The substitute for the Assyrian king Esarhaddon and his son Šamaš-šum-ukin was a person of the high echelon.

¹⁸ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 199, iii:110–11.

¹⁹ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 609, 135–36.

²⁰ Only by decreed fate things come into existence, concrete as well as abstract.

²¹ Mythological narratives describe ‘tablet of *šimātu* (plural)’ as the source of the actual control over the cosmos. It was held by the head of the pantheon.

²² Markham J. Geller, *Forerunners to UDU.G.HUL: Sumerian Exorcistic Incantations*, FAOS 12 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985), p. 37, 285–86.

²³ There is evidence, however, that in some (early) periods kings were deified after death, but then they ascended to heaven.

The impact of *šimtu* on human life was conceptualised aetiologically in the Old Babylonian myths of Atrahasis, which narrates the creation of humanity.²⁴ It appears that the gods did not put a limit to man's life span, which resulted in overpopulation and intolerable noise. After the deluge swept over to annihilate most of humanity, the birth goddess Nintu was appointed to decree '*šimtu*' to newborns, and thus to fix the boundaries of human life.

Akkadian *šimtu* 'fate' is a conceptual metaphor. It is attested as personified, objectified, or in combination with verbs of motion. Sumerian 'fate' (*nam*) occurs as personified in the god Namtar, whose name means 'to decree fate'.²⁵ Namtar is an agent of death and vizier of Ereshkigal, the queen of the netherworld.²⁶

Personified and objectified, *šimtu* is the subject of the verb 'to take away'. 'He who built a house saying: "this is my home, I built it and I shall rest in it, when fate will take me away, I shall sleep inside it"' (Erra IV:99–101); 'Fate took away my father' (BWL, 70:9b). 'Fate' as the object of the verb 'to go' is most common in administrative, legal, and historical texts, i.e. 'went to his fate' (*alāku ana šimti*): '(Enkidu) went to the fate of humanity'.²⁷ It is also the object of the verb 'to reach', 'to overtake', as in an answer of the oracle: 'The day of his fate (*ūm šimti*), the decreed evil end of his days, which he constantly dreads and fears, will not overtake him.'²⁸ Natural death is literally 'day of fate' (*ūm šimti*). Parallel expressions in the negative signify untimely death, usually translated as premature or unnatural death: 'not-destined day/death' (*ūm/mūt lā šimti*), and 'death by fate' and 'death by his god'. Mesopotamian scholars rationalised the apparent contradiction by arguing that the gods changed the fate of the deceased during his life. We find a salient example in the lament over the premature death of Urnamma, king of Ur (2112–2095 BCE). The goddess Inana accused the great gods of changing the king's fate (ETCSL 2.4.1.1 ll. 204–16).²⁹ Premature death is usually explained as retribution for sin, as in the case of the Assyrian king Sargon, who was killed in battle and remained unburied (SAA 3, 33).

²⁴ Text edition: Lambert and Millard, *Atra-hasis*; English translation: Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 227–77.

²⁵ Unlike Akkadian 'fate', the Sumerian 'nam' did not become a common metonym of 'death'.

²⁶ J. Klein, 'Namtar', in *Band 9: Nab – Nuzi, Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, ed. by E. Ebeling and B. Meissner, 15 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), ix, pp. 142–45. With this Sumerian name, he also features in Akkadian literature.

²⁷ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 279, ii:4.

²⁸ Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Oracle Questions* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), p. 4, 1:330–33.

²⁹ Urnamma was presumably killed on the battlefield.

Time

Time-based metaphors were inspired by the perception of predestined fate. These metaphors can be both positive and negative. ‘Day’ *ūmu* is an ellipsis that means ‘dying day’. ‘Appointed time’ *adannu* is the end of the lifetime, which was decided at birth and was the fulfilment of *šimtu*. Objectified as the subject of verbs of movement, ‘day’ and ‘appointed time’ convey a sense of progressive movement towards death. The Assyrian king Sargon describes the death of Daltaja, king of Ellipi, with three different expressions in one phrase: *adannu + kašādu*, *šimtu + abālu*, and *urhu + mūtu*: ‘The appointed time reached him (*kašādu*), fate carried him off (*abālu*), and he went the road (*urhu*) of death (*mūtu*)’ (RINAP, Sargon II, 007:117 + 2:456). An apodosi of a liver omen records a prediction for a sick man: ‘He will live until the appointed time (*adannu*), after his appointed time (*adannu*) he will die (*mūtu*)’ (CT 31, 36 r.19). In the personal name *Hadašū-likšud*, which means ‘May he (the baby) attain the full appointed time’, the blessed baby is the subject of the verb and ‘the appointed time’ is the object. When ‘day’ and ‘appointed time’ signify premature death, they bear a negative sense. In the warning ‘before his day the curse of humanity will reach him’ (BWL 128:114), ‘day’ is the objectified subject of the verb of movement ‘to reach’ (*kašādu*).

Turn to Clay – Death as Return to the Origins

The creation of man from a lump of clay mixed with the flesh and blood of a slaughtered god lent inspiration to the expression ‘return to clay’. After the departure of the spirit to the netherworld, the lifeless corpse once again likened the original clay, and from there, the meaning ‘to die’. In the aftermath of the deluge, ‘all humanity turned into clay’.³⁰ ‘Turn to clay’ signifies the closure of life cycle, a classic metaphor. It is a conceptual metaphor, however, when expanded to non-human subject. In the mythological dialogue of Erra and Ishum, it was applied to animals: ‘He cursed the herd and turned them into clay’ (Erra IV:150). The redactor of the account of the flood in the epic of Gilgamesh went even further, using the expression to metaphorise bygone times, the antediluvian era: ‘Belet-ili, the sweet-voiced, wailed: “the old days have truly turned to clay”’.³¹

³⁰ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 711, 135.

³¹ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 711, 118–19.

The Afterlife – in the Realm of Death

‘The dead do not greet man in the land’, said Utanapišti to Gilgameš.³² The realm of death lies beyond the horizons of the human senses. After sealing the grave, the dead do not meet the living, for they are invisible and inaudible. Their whereabouts beyond the grave were subject to the imagination. The ancient Mesopotamians modelled the habitat of the dead after the only ways of life they knew, their own, though inversed in essential physical aspects. They visualised an urban community, a kingdom or city-state, governed by institutions like theirs, and yet far away from the land of the living. They conceived of a road that the spirit took from the grave, either walking or driven in a carriage, or sailed. Traditionally, the entrance to the realm of death was at the place where the sun sets, in the west.

Food offerings in the grave submit that they imagined a barren landscape, where basic necessities for survival do not exist. The grave goods correspond with the textual evidence concerning the dependence of the dead on living kinsman for food, drink, and clothes. Often grave goods also included other personal items of the deceased, such as jewellery, cosmetics, seals, weapons, and even clay tablets. The tombs of the rich contained treasures of gold, silver, and precious stones. It is very important to remark that, although the textual evidence portrays a mirror image of the living world, and although texts refer to judgement of the dead, the Mesopotamians did not envision division of the netherworld to separate the virtuous from the malevolent, the god-lover from the sinner, hell from paradise. The kingdom of the dead was a model of equality: ‘Go up on to ancient ruins and walk about, see the skulls of high and low. Who is the wicked and who is the virtuous?’³³ The textual sources do not resolve the seemingly inconsistencies. For possible explanation I look at the cult of the dead. Performing the cult at home with an icon of the deceased, while his ghost joined his ancestors in the netherworld for eternity, means that he continued his terrestrial life, though in different size and substance. The dichotomous existence in cross-temporal realities allows inclusive attitudes towards the conflicting realities.

The Afterlife – Land and Landscape

A direct line leads from life to afterlife, from actual historical reality to a mythological, imaginative one. Yet, the land of the dead was a geographical concept like any land on Earth. Whether it was also the same with regard

³² George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 697, 318.

³³ Dialogue of Pessimism, BWL, pp. 148–49, 76–78.

geographical meanings: physical – mountain; political – land (hostile); and cosmic – netherworld. In view of the customary burial practice, the meaning 'mountain' is challenging.³⁷ Was it visualised as an actual mountain or was it a euphemism of an unknown origin? If it is actual, where is it? Moreover, an actual mountain implies that the netherworld did not stretch under the whole lower part of the cosmos but at a certain spot, and it entails different roads from all over Sumer as well as a variety of transportation means. Be that as it may, only the Zagros mountain range can be seen from the alluvial plain, stretching along the eastern border of Sumer (kalam) towards the north-east. An overlap would mean that the land of the dead was an actual mountain within the Zagros mountain range. Some Sumerian lamentations over young dying gods indeed describe the netherworld by visible parts of an actual mountain. These texts which transmit ancient cultic traditions suggest that in prehistorical times the Sumerians or other inhabitants of the alluvial plain believed that the netherworld was amid the Zagros mountains.³⁸ During the historical periods, 'kur' became a generic name of the netherworld. Its descriptions connote an underground place rather than a mountain. The Sumerian term 'kur' pervaded the Akkadian language as a Sumerogram, denoting merely 'land', *eršetu* in Akkadian.³⁹

In Akkadian texts, the term *eršetu* is the standard appellation of 'netherworld'. This term is also a comprehensive geographical concept, both mythological and actual. *eršetu* signifies Earth (cosmic), land (polity), and ground (soil). These three meanings are also applicable to different aspects of the netherworld itself: *eršetu* is a cosmic region in binary opposition to heaven, the land of the dead, and the excavated grave. In the textual context, *eršetu* imparts a general idea of an existing place. We can at best classify it as a conceptual metaphor.

Essentially devoid of specific geographical markers, *eršetu* as meaning 'netherworld' is detected only in context, or when it is qualified by an adjective. Compound expressions such as 'land of the dead' (*eršetu mītūti*) suggest that 'land' alone is an ellipsis. Three common compound expressions formulate the three principal geographical characteristics of the netherworld: 'wide land' (*eršetu rapaštu*), 'distant land' (*eršetu rūqtu*), and 'deep land' (*eršetu šaplātu*). The netherworld is a big and faraway underground

³⁷ Why 'kur'? For the problem and a possible answer, see: Katz, *Image of the Netherworld*, pp. 105–09. It is not impossible that the forefathers of the Sumerians performed 'sky burials' or another provisional burial, but there is no evidence for that to date.

³⁸ Lamentations over young dying gods, who symbolised the changing seasons, Dumuzi, Damu. See Katz, *Image of the Netherworld*, pp. 63–84.

³⁹ The meanings 'mountain' and 'land' were translated *šadū* and *mātu* (respectively). Akkadian *mātu* had no cosmic or mythological aspect, as opposed to *eršetu*. In its cosmic mythological aspects, *eršetu* was written usually by the Sumerogram 'ki'.

land. The Sumerian loanword *kigallu* (ki.gal) – ‘big place’ – imparts the same image. The qualification ‘no return’ (nu.gi₄.a/lā târi) metaphorises the very essence of death and the netherworld. It qualifies ‘kur’ in ‘kur.nu.gi₄.a’, ‘land of no return’, and the journey to the realm of death:⁴⁰ ‘journey from which there is no return’, ‘road which has no way back’.

The netherworld was also visualised in urban terms. Most common is ‘big city’ (Sumerian irigal/urugal, Akkadian *Irkallu*). The model was the Sumerian city-states, the small kingdoms that typified the political landscape of Sumer in the third millennium. The distinct image is compatible with the general geographical terms ‘land’ and ‘place’. The image of city survived in the cultic, religious, and literary traditions long after the system of city-states ceased to exist.⁴¹ It is uncertain in periods of territorial states and empires whether scribes imagined the city literally, metaphorically, or copied traditions while diligently not giving much thought to the text.

‘Big city’ is attested in poetic texts since the third millennium. An interesting example is the description of the creation of the netherworld (irigal) from the corpse of Asag, a primordial creature which threatens the world order: ‘its body shall be the netherworld’ (‘Ninurta’s exploits’ ETCSL 1.6.2:329). This aetiology imparts the perception that the netherworld is an intrinsically evil and dangerous place like the material from which it was created.

The city Kutha was the cult centre of Nergal, the king of the netherworld. Kutha is attested in some first-millennium texts as a metaphor for ‘netherworld’.⁴²

The netherworld was also described as ‘house’ in a classic episode of descent to the kingdom of death:

To the dark house, the seat of Irkalla,
 To the house whose comers do not leave
 To the house whose comers thirst for light
 On the door and bolt lies dust

(IšD:4–11; var: GE VII:184–91; N&E:149–56)

GE adds ‘House of dust’ (GE VIII:193). All three witnesses of this poetic description treat the netherworld as a kingdom. ‘Seat of Irkalla’ metaphorises the palace of the queen of the netherworld. The Assyrian king Sennacherib

⁴⁰ STT 73:38. *harran lā târi*; ID: Foster, *Before the Muses*, p. 499, 6; GE: George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 644, 186; N&E 16:151. *harrāni ša alaktaša lā tājara*.

⁴¹ The perception of urban community is invested also in descriptions of architectural details. The mythological narratives visualise entrance through seven gates, with seven gatekeepers (ID, IšD, N&E), which lead to a courtyard and palaces of the netherworld gods.

⁴² e.g. ID:40, Foster, *Before the Muses*, p. 500.

speaks in his royal inscriptions of 'palace of sleep' and 'palace of repose' as metaphors for his tomb.⁴³ References to dust draw on the image of an excavated grave. Darkness is more common: 'dark house', 'dark place' (ki-kukku₂).⁴⁴ Gilgameš' fear of death and his craving for the fullness of life is accentuated by playing on the theme of light, the opposite of darkness: 'Now let my eyes look on the sun so I am sated with light, is darkness far, how much light is there? When may a dead see the rays of the sun?'⁴⁵

Arali usually signifies mostly the cosmic aspect of the netherworld in binary opposition to heaven. Originally, Arali was the steppe between the cities of Uruk and Bad-tibira where the Sumerian mythology of Dumuzi situated his death by the 'galla', the agents of the netherworld. At the beginning of the second millennium, it was mythologised and became a name of the netherworld.

The Afterlife – Location and Journey

The location of the netherworld posed no smaller a problem than the images of the place. The inability to discern mythological reality from actuality affected also the descriptions of the passage to the netherworld.

The habitat of the dead was completely separated and seemingly far from the world of the living. Where was it, which direction, and how far? The common view was that the sun god (*Šamaš*/Utu) escorts the deceased to the netherworld at sunset. Accordingly, the entrance was on the western horizon. This belief entailed a long journey from the grave to the realm of death. Metaphors of 'journey' (*harranu*) and 'road' (*urhu*) conceptualise the departure of the spirit from the grave and instil a sense of distance.⁴⁶ But although the netherworld had to be reached from any site in the land, there is little to describe the road westwards. An incantation against evil spirits asserts that a road is laid for them from the netherworld to the grave and that they walk westwards.⁴⁷ In my view, their walk westwards recapit-

⁴³ As opposed to mausoleums. See the royal burials in vaults under the palace of the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II in Nimrud (883–824 BCE). The vaults contained stone sarcophagi of Assyrian queens and clay and bronze sarcophagi of unidentified courtiers. For a comprehensive study, see Tracy L. Spurrier, 'Finding Hama: On the Identification of a Forgotten Queen Buried in the Nimrud Tombs', *JNES*, 76.1 (2017), pp. 149–74.

⁴⁴ Place qualified by adjective. For examples, see Katz, *Image of the Netherworld*, pp. 223–25.

⁴⁵ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 277: 13–15.

⁴⁶ Chariot harnessed to oxen was found in two royal tombs in Ur; this actualises the idea of distance: C. Leonard Woolley, *Ur Excavations II. The Royal Cemetery: A Report on the Predynastic and Sargonid Graves Excavated between 1926 and 1931* (The Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1934), pls. 29–30 and 36. Some tombs contained models of boats.

⁴⁷ Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, p. 72 g., UHF: 250–52.

ulates the statement that they walk from the netherworld to the grave. The concept of a western entrance mythologises the grave and, therefore, ‘west’ simply becomes a metaphor for grave. A Sumerian lament over the young dying god describes his mother crossing the marshes eastwards towards the mountains.⁴⁸ The secret of the journey is in the funerary ritual. A performative utterance – ‘his wind is released’ – magically transferred the spirit from the corpse further into the netherworld.⁴⁹ The duration of the ritual outlines the length of the journey, which traditionally lasted seven days.

Roads were referenced when texts required it.⁵⁰ Much like ‘land’ and ‘place’, ‘journey’ and ‘road’ are attested alone as ellipsis, or qualified by ‘netherworld’, ‘death’, or ‘fate’ (*šimtu*). The road leading to the netherworld is the hinge of a multi-part parallelism in a diviner’s prayer to a healing goddess on behalf of a sick man: ‘... he is prematurely sent on his road (*urhu*) to the netherworld. The Anunaki who set the boundaries of the spirit of man carry him to the road (*uruh*) of the netherworld. His god and his goddess forgot his day and his fate, he sets off on a road (*urhu*), and departs on the journey (*harrānu*) which has no way back.’⁵¹ ‘Journey from which there is no return’ and ‘road which has no way back’ emphasise the absolute termination of life. ‘The journey of whole humanity’⁵² metaphorises the universal aspect of death. ‘Road’ (*urhu*) requires verbs of movement. Most prominent is ‘to walk’ (*alāku*). ‘Walk the road’ and ‘walk the road of death’ (literally ‘fate’, *šimtu*) is a euphemism which generates a sense of dynamic process. The verb ‘to walk’ is comparable to the modern euphemism ‘to depart’. It is attested alone as ellipsis, qualified by ‘road’, in combination with ‘fate’ (*šimtu*) and with ‘fate of humanity’ (*šimāt awilūtīm*). It is also attested with the euphemism ‘departure’: ‘walked to his departure’ (*anammušišu*) means ‘death’.⁵³ These metaphors were indeed widely used in non-poetic texts as euphemisms rather than for literary embellishment.

Life in the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia was made possible by the two big rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and by a network of irrigation canals that also served as waterways. As it was in everyday reality, so also the journey to the netherworld involved crossing watercourses. Models of boats that were found in mid-third-millennium burials are

⁴⁸ Katz, *Image of the Netherworld*, pp. 19–20, 22–23. The early second-millennium versions undoubtedly hark back to an old oral tradition from early third millennium.

⁴⁹ Katz, ‘Emergence of the Ghost’, pp. 419–37.

⁵⁰ Assorted vehicles among grave goods testify to a belief in an actual road.

⁵¹ Divination. See Erica Reiner, ‘Fortune-Telling in Mesopotamia’, *JNES*, 19.1 (1960), pp. 23–35.

⁵² Katz, *Image of the Netherworld*, pp. 318–19 c., 4R 30 no. 2:30.

⁵³ CAD N/1, 235.

indisputable evidence.⁵⁴ The 'Babylonian map of the world' (sixth century BCE) shows a perfect circle of water bordering Babylonia. Beyond it we see triangles that represent mountains (*kur*), as if on the outer edge of the world.⁵⁵ This image is reminiscent of the description of Gilgameš crossing the waters of death on the last expanse of his epic journey to the immortal Utanapišti.⁵⁶ An elegy to a woman who died in labour likens her to a boat:

Why are you cast adrift like a boat in midstream,
Your crossbars broken, your tows cut; your face veiled,
You cross the river of the Inner City.⁵⁷

The mythological narrative of Enlil and Ninlil describes the journey of Enlil, the king of the gods to the netherworld. On his way, Enlil crossed the 'river of the netherworld' (*id₂-kur*), whose name is 'The man-eating river'. Since the late second millennium, scholarly texts name the river of the netherworld *Hubur*. Crossing the river into the periphery of the netherworld means death: 'Our fathers are gone, they walk the road of death (*illikū uruh mūtu*); "they crossed the river *Hubur*" is an old saying' (BWL 70:16–17). This couplet has three metaphors: 'gone', literally 'given', signifies death in parallel to 'walk the road of death', and 'cross the river *Hubur*'. Just as crossing the river means death, being pulled out of the river means being rescued through a prayer to the god of justice: 'You pull out of *Hubur* him who is caught in law suit' (BWL 128:62). The same metaphor appears in personal praise of the god Marduk: 'he pulled me out of *Hubur*' (BWL 58:7). A unique attestation as synecdoche references *hubur* in binary opposition with heaven: '(Marduk) who has explored the height of the remote heavens, who knows the depth of the wide *Hubur*'.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Woolley, *Ur Excavations* vol. II pl. 16, 19, 20, 85, i68.

⁵⁵ Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, pp. 12–22.

⁵⁶ George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 683:78ff. Two mythological narratives describe sailing to the netherworld: the lament over the dying god Ningishzida (ETCSL 1.7.3) and the god Enki sailing (perhaps on sea) to the netherworld in the introduction to Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the netherworld (ETCSL 1.8.1.4:14–28).

⁵⁷ Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, p. 37 (15:1–3). The 'inner city' describes the realm of the dead.

⁵⁸ Marduk's address to the demons, AfO 17 (1954–56):312 A, 9. The unique use of *Hubur* in the cosmic formula is particularly interesting because *Hubur* alludes to Tiamat, whom Marduk vanquished and from whose body created the world in *Enūma eliš*. The epithet *hubur* means 'din'. See CAD H, 220, s.v. *hubūru*. Usually this formula employs conventional names of the netherworld: *ki*, *arali*, *kigallu*.

Conclusions

Sightings of dead people in dreams rationalises the belief in the afterlife and the anthropomorphic image of the spirits. The belief that the ghost was created from the remains of a slaughtered god merited the dead with certain superhuman powers that determined their status as family deities and generated the cult of the dead. Although the cult of the dead was an important part of the Mesopotamian's family life, death and the afterlife do not really take a central place in the ancient Sumerian and Akkadian Mesopotamian writings. The cultic practice was routine 'family religion'; the literati were more engaged with issues of life, primarily the (poor) condition of mankind.

Speculations about the netherworld are usually embedded in mythological narratives where the focus is on deities. Human beings have no role in the mythological narratives. The netherworld was deemed actual and, in terms of the world of the living, was presumably the image of Babylonia. Unlike living conditions and needs which gods and men shared, death and dying is exclusively the lot of humanity.⁵⁹ The textual division between the divine and the human realms is comparable to the picture that the texts draw concerning the world of the living. The division is *between* the realms not within them. The gods form the ruling echelon, but the laws of the netherworld apply to all, gods and humanity alike. The general sphere beyond the boundaries of life is a gloomy reality for the divine no less than for human beings.

Apparently, the belief in the afterlife did not raise positive expectations among the Mesopotamians. Life was not a corridor for a glorious afterlife, and no one waited with anticipation for death. The deceased was left in a dark dusty grave, with food, drink, and personal belongings that mark his identity. Grave goods connote belief or hope in a sort of existence. But what can man expect from a place where the sun does not shine and nothing can grow or be produced.⁶⁰

A representational perception of the universe led the Mesopotamians to attribute death to agents of the netherworld, carriers of deadly diseases, and any evil under the sun.⁶¹ The image of these agents getting a hold of

⁵⁹ Creation myths make unavoidable exceptions. The creation of the world from primordial material in a gender-defined biological process involves the death of divine beings, like Tiamat in the creation myth of *Enūma elish*. The ghost was created from a slaughtered god. Vanquished divine beings were sent to the netherworld, although they were not killed like human beings.

⁶⁰ Compared with other religions, their pessimistic view of afterlife is intriguing.

⁶¹ Described in anthropomorphic terms in the lamentations over the young dying gods and in the incantations against evil spirits.

their victims objectified the process of death. It developed into the belief that the netherworld is the origin and habitat of evil creatures. This image grew grimmer over the periods as the number of mixed fearsome creatures increased.⁶² Iconographic representations indeed show monstrous scary beings with eagle talons. Incantations against evil spirits and prayers to appease gods illustrate this fear, while the discourse over death mainly shows acceptance. The fear of death is translated into metaphors and euphemisms, disclosing an inclination to avoid explicit statements. The spoken and written words were loaded and confrontational and deemed performative.

Figurative language seems to distance the actors from the factual and thus lessen the pain of direct confrontation with death. The personification of death was another practical means to face reality. Personification concretised death, turned it into an agency, thus into an operative target of incantations and rituals that healers manipulated to save the lives of their patients.⁶³

The perception of the netherworld becomes apparent as we examine the cult of the dead, a ritual designed to provide the deceased with food, drink, and garments. The cult entails that the landscape is barren and unproductive, and actualises the mutual dependence of the living and the dead. Hungry ancestors can be dangerous. The performance is in the hand of the family, usually the responsibility of the eldest son and heir.⁶⁴ The deceased participated in the procedure in his clay image. The ritual actualised the idea that the deceased reincorporated with his family, from whom he departed at death.⁶⁵ Thus, the cult unfolds a dichotomous existence of the dead in two different modes: as a ghost in the netherworld and as a clay image in his earthly family home.⁶⁶ Textual evidence, incantations, and rituals against evil spirits show that dead family members up to three generations were mentioned by name during the ritual. Afterwards they were mentioned as a group.

The afterlife was the continuation of life on Earth in an ethereal form and in a different place. Therefore, the imagery of afterlife had to imitate real life, adapted to the presumed ecological conditions under the ground, e.g. living in a grave. It is interesting, however, that rather than a promise

⁶² The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian prince. See Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, no. 32, rev. 2–15.

⁶³ For example, the ritual that transferred the mortal danger to a substitute. The protocol of this ritual assigns a lamb as substitute. See Katz, 'Emergence of the Ghost', pp. 422–23.

⁶⁴ Administrative texts record adoption of children for the performance of the ritual when the time comes. Very instructive are cases of adoption of girls as sons.

⁶⁵ Katz, 'Emergence of the Ghost', on the rite of passage as model.

⁶⁶ We can compare this concept to the belief that gods lived in their statues.

of a blissful afterlife, the Mesopotamians envisioned a gloomy and hollow netherworld, that their fantasy extended to the portrayal of the monstrous creatures rather than a glorious paradise.

Abbreviations

AbB	Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung (Leiden, 1964 ff.)
BWL	Babylonian Wisdom Literature (Lambert, <i>Babylonian Wisdom Literature</i>)
Eršemma	(Cohen, <i>Sumerian Hymnology</i>)
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literatures (https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
FAOS	Freiburger Altorientalische Studien
GE	Gilgamesh Epic
ID	The myth of Inana's descent (ETCSL 1.4.1)
IšD	The myth of Ishtar's descent (Foster, <i>Before the Muses</i> , pp. 498–505)
N&E	The myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal (Foster, <i>Before the Muses</i> , pp. 506–24)
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
SAA	State archives of Assyria
UHF	Udug-Hul Forerunners

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Chapter 3

The Perception of the Human Body in the Ancient Egyptian Funerary Literature and the Book of the Dead

Rita Lucarelli

Imagining the experience of death from the etic perspective of the living generally results, in many societies, ancient and modern, into an attempt to understand the spiritual dimension that transcends the bodily one. While the body is seen as related mainly to the living, the soul/spirit part of an individual is conceived as belonging to the realm of the dead. Although depictions of bodies populate the imageries of the beyond in ancient as well as in modern religious cultures, those bodies are interpreted mainly as visual depictions of the *souls/spirits* of the dead, and not as *physical* bodies themselves. The survival and resurrection of the soul, which is discussed in many studies of philosophy and history of religions, is therefore seen in contrast to the decadence of the body, which even when preserved with care through mummification, as in ancient Egypt, it remains on and belongs to the earth.¹

The ancient Egyptian funerary literature and iconography are central sources to understand the conception of the body in their society, although they may at first sight appear confusing since they describe and depict bodies of different kinds: the human, intact and always covered bodies of the deceased, the decapitated or amputated bodies of the damned, the hybrid bodies of the deities, and liminal beings populating the regions of the netherworld. By analysing the textual and iconographical evidence

¹ However, the belief in the resurrection of the body in the Beyond is a central belief in several religions such as Christianity and Judaism. See Candida Moss, *Divine Bodies. Resurrecting Perfection in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2019). More, in particular, on the monastic belief in the sacrality of the human body and its resurrection according to Christ's embodiment and the full humanity of Jesus, see Caroline T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies. Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), in particular chap. 4, pp. 126–57.

available on different media (from papyrus to coffins and tomb walls) that provides images of bodies which are situated in between the reality of death on earth and the imagined experience of life in the netherworld, we may attempt an emic interpretation of the ancient Egyptian world view on issues of thanatology and eschatology such as how the body of the deceased is transfigured in the state of 𓆎 (*ḥ/Akh*), the function of hybridity in the body of deities and demonic inhabitants of the *Duat* (the ancient Egyptian netherworld), and the symbolism of nudity for the defeated bodies of the damned.


It is in the so-called ‘Book of the Dead’ and the ‘Netherworld Books’ that bodies of various human and non-human beings are mostly illustrated and accompanied by texts and captions explaining the main function of the images. In these compositions, mainly dated to the New Kingdom and which collect and re-interpret also earlier ideas on life after death,² we can individuate the specific terminology employed to describe different kinds of bodies and body parts; it is, however, thanks to the images accompanying and often explaining the texts that we can attempt to comprehend the uniqueness of the ancient Egyptian funerary art and religion in relation to the conceptions of the body.³


These images are expression of the so-called *Bildzauber*, ‘figurative magic’ or ‘magic with images’, which enhanced the amuletic function of the magical papyri or objects where the incantations were copied on.⁴ The way ancient Egyptians conceived images is also central for the understanding of images of the body. In the ancient Egyptian language there are different terms that define images in different contexts and according to different literary or magical settings. At least four of them are relevant to comprehend the function of the body in magical and funerary practices and beliefs.

² The Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts are traditionally considered the predecessors of the Book of the Dead and of later funerary compositions.

³ For a study of the body in the earlier funerary literature (Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts), see Francesca Iannarilli, *Il corpo spezzato. Costruire e decostruire la figura umana nella tradizione funeraria egizia* (Venezia: Antichistica 38/Studi Orientali 14, 2024); Rune Nyord, *Breathing Flesh: Conceptions of the Body in the Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Copenhagen: Carsten Niebhuur Publications, 2009).

⁴ On *Bildzauber* see Peter Eschweiler, *Bildzauber im alten Ägypten: Die Verwendung von Bildern und Gegenständen in magischen Handlungen nach den Texten des Mittleren und Neuen Reiches* (Universitätsverlag and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Freiburg and Göttingen, 1994). On the use of *Bildzauber* in magical compositions in the Greek magical papyri from Egypt, see Rita Lucarelli, ‘The “Vignettes” of the Greek Magical Papyri. Visual Elements of the Pharaonic Magical Tradition and the Use of *Bildzauber* in the PG’, in *The Iconography of Magic. Images of Power and the Power of Images in Ancient and Late Antique Magic*, ed. by R. M. Hernández, *Studies in the History and Anthropology of Religion* 7 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022), pp. 1–15.

The first term,  (twt), could be translated as statue, likeness, and it is especially used to refer to potential manifestations of the god. The semantic classifier (or ‘determinative’⁵) for this term is a mummified figure, which occurs also to indicate the mummy and the completeness and entirety of a body.⁶ This word occurs for instance in the funerary instructions of Spell 137A of the Book of the Dead, which indicate a ritual for extinguishing four torches in milk, which occurred after the ritual of the opening of the mouth and which was performed ‘each time you let your image (twt) come to any gate (rryt) of these seven gates of Osiris’.⁷

Another term related to the image of the deceased is  (ššmw), ‘manifestation’ (of a divine being) or ‘guide’,⁸ denoting in particular ritual images enhancing the funerary space of the tomb into the underworld itself, giving therefore agency to the images of gods and liminal beings who were providing access in the *Duat* to the deceased, but also suggesting a new dimension to the manifestation of the deceased in the *Duat* in a transfigured state, separate from the mummified body. The ššmw as ‘image’ occurs indeed in Spell 100 and 130 of the Book of the Dead, which are ritual compositions empowering the deceased so that he can join the sun god’s crew in his boat across the sky; the ritual instructions of Spell 100 say: ‘words to be said over this image ... by placing it on the chest of the transfigured deceased, without letting it touch his body’.⁹

A figured and implicit version of a ššmw could be the composite body appearing in a scene of the 2nd hour of the so-called ‘Amduat’ ‘What is in the netherworld’, which was part of the so-called Books of the Netherworld and was used to decorate the royal tombs of the New Kingdom. It depicts the elongated body of a crocodile with a human head on his back, and it is labelled as ‘One who guides (ššm) those who are in it’; we could therefore

⁵ ‘Semantic classifiers’, which are also called ‘determinatives’, are signs encoding the ancient Egyptian categorisation of the world; see Orly Goldwasser, ‘From Determinatives to Classifiers: Categorisation in the Ancient Egyptian Writing System’, in *Guide to the Writing Systems of Ancient Egypt*, ed. by S. Polis (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 2023), pp. 192–99.

⁶ For twt used as adjective for ‘entire, complete’, see <<https://thesaurus-linguae-aegyptiae.de/lemma/400242>>.

⁷ For the full text of this spell, see Stephen Quirke, *Going Out in Daylight – Pt m hrw: The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead. Translation, Sources, Meanings* (London: Golden House Publications, 2013), pp. 307–10; on the ritual nature of Spell 137A, see Yekaterina Barbash, ‘The Ritual Context of the Book of the Dead’, in *Book of the Dead: Becoming God in Ancient Egypt*, Oriental Institute Museum Publications 40, ed. by F. Scalf (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute, 2017), pp. 75–84, in particular pp. 77–78.

⁸ Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, pp. 12–16.

⁹ See Barbash, ‘The Ritual Context of the Book of the Dead’, p. 80 for the ritual and amuletic context of this spell and its instructions.



Figure 3.1: Tomb of Ramses V and VI (KV 9). Amduat, second hour: boat with crocodile (@Theban Mapping Project Image # 14752).

interpret this composite crocodile figure as a *sšmw*, a guide for the dead king to travel in the netherworld (see Figure 3.1).

When referring instead to the static corpse in the coffin, the terms *ḥt* (𓆎) and *s'ḥ* (𓆏) occur in funerary texts since the Pyramid Texts; these terms contrast with the *bj* (𓆑), the bird with the deceased's head that is generally translated as 'soul' because it moves in and out of the body, although also the *bj* has a very well-defined corporeal dimension. *Bj*, *kj*, and *s'ḥ* are in fact closely related and independent, as the *bj* needs to return to the tomb to reunite with the body every night; in the vignette of Spell 89 of the Book Dead of Tjenena (Louvre N 3074¹⁰), the body of the deceased is depicted as a dark, skeletal silhouette, rather than as a mummified body, and it has been interpreted in this scene also as his shadow, *šwt* (𓆑).¹¹ The title Spell 89 of the Book of the Dead clearly describes the magical function that this text holds for the protection of the body, and for this

¹⁰ <<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010378255>>

¹¹ The shadow as manifestation of the dead in the netherworld and mentioned in the ancient Egyptian funerary literature, has been analysed in Beate George. *Zu den altägyptischen Vorstellungen vom Schatten als Seele* (Bonn: Habelt, 1970) and more recently by Renée Riskalla, 'Shadows in the Hidden Chamber: A Study of the *šwt* in Funerary Texts and Art of Ancient Egypt' (thesis, Macquarie University, 2019). On the vignette of Spell 89, see also H. Milde, *The Vignettes of the Book of the Dead of Neferrenpet* (Leiden: Egyptologische Uitgaven 7, 1991), pp. 187–88.

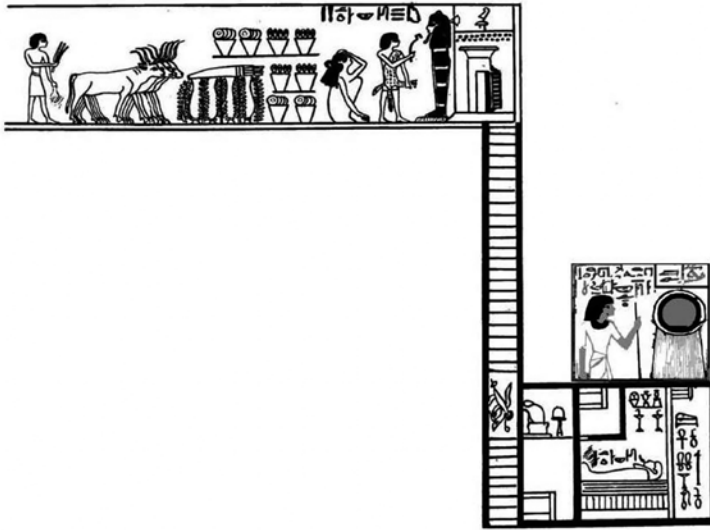


Figure 3.2: Book of the Dead of Nebqed (Papyrus Louvre N 3068), vignette of Spell 1 (sketch by Peter Robinson).

reason variants of Spell 89 are also attested on the sarcophagus. In the final invocation of the same formula, it is said:

May he see his corpse (*ḥt*) and rest on his mummified body (*sḥ*), he will not perish, he will not be destroyed, bodily, forever.¹²

Similar to the already mentioned vignette of Spell 89, the vignette of Spell 92 of the Book of the Dead shows the body of the deceased is often represented by a black silhouette, which also in this case could be interpreted as the shadow or skeleton of the deceased; this may actually be a reference to the body weakened by the *b*'s remoteness, which needs to return to the tomb to breathe new life into the emaciated and abandoned body.¹³

Another interesting illustration is part of the vignette accompanying Spell 1 in the Book of the Dead of Nebqed (eighteenth Dynasty),¹⁴ which

¹² Quirke, *Going Out in Daylight*, p. 205.

¹³ See Rita Lucarelli, 'La protezione del corpo nelle formule del Libro dei Morti', in *Miraggi d'eternità: le mummie egizie dal tempo dei papiri ad oggi*, ed. by N. Reggiani (Parma: Silva Editore, 2024) on the mummified body and its need for protection in the tomb and the netherworld.

¹⁴ Papyrus Louvre N 3068: <<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010003125>>

depicts the ba descending into the tomb to reunite with the body, as also mentioned in Spell 89 (see above); in this vignette, however, it is not the body that is depicted but the anthropoid sarcophagus that encloses and protects it (see Figure 3.2).

Interestingly, the caption on the sarcophagus does not mention a proper term for ‘body’ (ḥt, sšmw, or twt) but the name of the deceased, the scribe Nebqed; the mummified body in the sarcophagus seems therefore to be completely assimilated to the deceased and their name, acquiring an agency of its own. To be noted is that this peculiar vignette also includes a figure of the deceased in his living body, emerging from the tomb itself, as if representing the final rebirth of the deceased after death, not as an ʿḥ (transfigured spirit) as it would be expected but in its physicality. This vignette remains unique among the variants of Spell 1 of the Book of the Dead;¹⁵ it recalls another peculiar scene on an ostrakon found at Deir el Medina, which has been labelled as ‘funeral ostrakon’ since it clearly depicts a funeral and the deposition of three mummified bodies in their coffins within a similar tomb shaft section and subterranean burial chambers, although the b³ bird descending in the burial chamber is here replaced by a human figure (see Figure 3.3).¹⁶

These kinds of images evoke the same two main principles that we find in funerary texts when referring to the body; namely, sustenance (to keep the body intact) and transformation (to become a god).¹⁷ Death is imagined in its full corporeality through the many forms that the deceased’s body can take, from human-headed bird (b³) to transfigured spirit (ʿḥ). The physical and spiritual dimensions of death are not perceived as opposite but rather as complementary to each other.

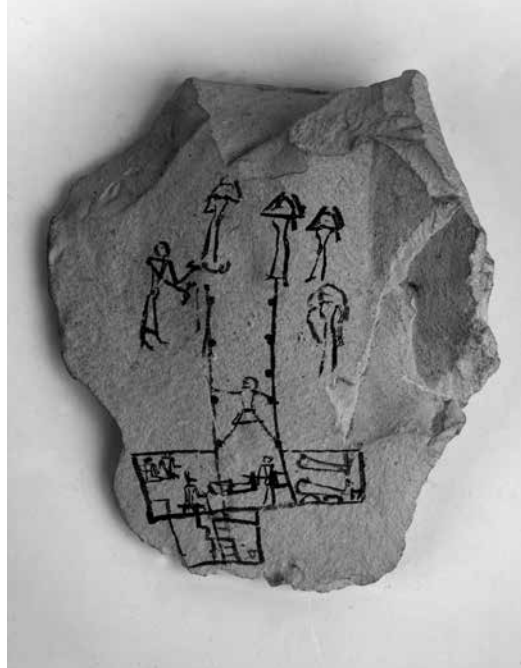
The reality of death, for the ancient Egyptians, started with the funeral and the deposition of the body in the tomb, as we have seen represented in the ‘funeral ostrakon’ and in the papyrus of Nebqed, and continued within the spatial confinement of the burial chamber first, and of the *Duat*, the ancient Egyptian beyond, which from the magical and funerary texts and images appears to be a landscape filled with bodily creatures too. Death

¹⁵ On Spell 1 of the Book of the Dead, see Tarek S. Tawfik, ‘Spell 1 of the Book of the Dead and its Vignette’, in *Handbook of the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. by R. Lucarelli and M. Stadler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 357–72.

¹⁶ On this ostrakon, see Peter Robinson, ‘The Manchester “Funeral” Ostrakon: A Sketch of a Funerary Ritual’, in *Mummies, Magic and Medicine in Ancient Egypt: Multidisciplinary Essays for Rosalie David*, ed. by C. Price, R. Forshaw, A. Chamberlain, P. T. Nicholson, and R. Morkot (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 32–47.

¹⁷ Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2005), thoroughly discusses these two principles and how they are expressed in funerary texts of the Pharaonic period.

Figure 3.3: Ostrakon Manchester 5886 (Photo and copyrights by Peter Robinson).



is therefore imagined as an empowering experience and unique chance to trespass the confinement of the tomb and of the human body itself, by magically acquiring freedom of movement and the possibility to go in and out of the tomb, as expressed in the spells of the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead mentioned above.

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Chapter 4

Incan Death as Challenge – Conceptualisations of the Mysterious Way from *kay pacha* to *hurin pacha*

Lidia Ożarowska

*Me sentí muerto, me sentí percibidor abstracto del mundo [...] me sospeché poseedor del sentido reticente o ausente de la inconcebible palabra ‘eternidad’.*¹

In this mental impression related by Jorge Luis Borges, the experience of being dead is presented as involving a feeling of having understood the concept of eternity, and presumably of participating in it. The speaking spirit is clearly a conscious and self-aware being, perceiving the world from outside and relating the sensation.

Even though separated by centuries, Borges’ conceptualisation of death bears many similarities to the ideas prevailing in the Incan world. Their vision of death and afterlife, as far as can be gathered from the scarce and often indirect sources, is astonishingly consistent with many modern metaphysical and cosmological views. At the same time, it has its own distinctive character and often amazes modern observers with the complexity and insight of the underlying world view.

Sources

The main challenge in reconstructing Incan ideas about death and dying (or any other topic, for that matter) lies in the scarcity of the available sources as well as in their indirect nature. Most valuable to us are those

*I would like to thank Joaquín J. A. Molina M. for his generous help and guidance with bibliographic search and access to sources, which enabled me to carry out a focused investigation.

¹ J. L. Borges, *Historia de la eternidad* (Buenos Aires: Debolsillo, 2011), p. 41: ‘I felt I was dead; I felt I was an abstract perceiver of the world; I suspected that I possessed the reticent or absent sense of the inconceivable word ‘eternity’ (trans. by L. O.).

written by Incan descendants, who, even though often already influenced by the culture of the conquistadors, were the closest we have to indigenous sources. In this category there are: Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, the author of the Huarochirí Manuscript, and Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamayhua. Apart from these, there are multiple chronicles and accounts written by Spanish explorers, missionaries, and governors, who aimed to describe (not always for commendable reasons) the cultures they were interacting with.

While some vocabulary used in the sources testifies to the Spanish/Christian influence (for instance, the soul is referred to as *alma*, and the spirit as *ánima*),² this does not necessarily mean that the representation of the Incan thought was affected as well: as far as is possible to tell, it appears that the concepts behind these terms remained indigenous. As Taylor has remarked, the Incan soul, as presented in the sources, is far from behaving like a Christian soul.³ Connectedly, even though the Christian chroniclers often imposed their cultural perspective on the subject of their study, it does not detract from the value of their work, as most of them were very diligent in recording details of the Incan ways and practices. Therefore, the accounts we read do present the indigenous world, even if often through the process of cultural translation.

The Setting

According to the Incas, human experience, during lifetime as well as beyond, could take place in three worlds: *kay pacha* (this world), *hurin pacha* (lower world), also called *ucu pacha* (interior world), and *hanan pacha* (upper world). At the end of the earthly life in *kay pacha*, souls of the dead would continue their existence in another (usually the lower) world, to which they travelled after the person's death. The exact location of this place is not traceable to us in the extant sources, but what can be identified is a set of cultural associations it entailed. It was usually placed to the south of the area inhabited by a given community (e.g. south of Lake Titicaca, or beyond the River Lauca), although it was occasionally localised in the west as well.⁴ It was mainly visualised simply as the end of the world, beyond which there is no light.⁵

² C. Classen, *Inca Cosmology and the Human Body* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1993), p. 152.

³ G. Taylor, "'Camay', 'camac' et 'camasca' dans le manuscrit Quechua de Huarochirí", *Journal de la Société des américanistes*, 63 (1974–76), p. 233.

⁴ M. C. García Escudero, 'El mundo de los muertos en la cosmovisión centroandina', *Gazeta de Antropología*, 25.2 (2009), art. 51, 7.

⁵ F. de Ávila, *Dioses y hombres de Huarochirí* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos,

Even though *hurin pacha* was conceived of as a clearly separate space below the terrestrial plane (where *kay pacha* lay), there were points of contact between them. They mainly took the form of caves, which constituted two-way communication channels: they provided a way from the world of the living down to the world of the dead along the same route through which, according to Incan mythology, Mother Earth gave birth to different *ayllus* (tribes), who, having risen to existence in the world of the living, used caves as their first settlement sites. According to Polo Ondegardo, the Incas claimed that after the mythological Deluge, seven people emerged from a cave near Cuzco, who then populated the world by reproduction.⁶

Such placement is not unusual and it has close parallels in many other societies. Yulia Ustinova, in her comprehensive work on the cultural associations and uses of caves among ancient Greeks, remarks that caves attracted the connection with the underworld by their very nature: ‘Caves, dark and menacing, seemed bottomless to people who did not dare to penetrate their damp depths.’ Hence, the idea that these places served as passages to the netherworld was very common. For the same reason, they were also used as oracles – as were clefts and fissures in the earth, which were places of cult of the goddess Gaia (Earth).⁷

In the Incan imagination, the world of the dead was a damp and murky place, which has induced some scholars to see it as a parallel with the interior of the human body.⁸ However, these features did not necessarily arise from such an association. Given its location – underneath the world of the living, inside the earth – this description appears most natural, as it is determined by perceptual factors. Most probably for the same reason, this world was believed to be completely silent; that’s why it was also called Upamarca, which means ‘the Land of the Mute’.⁹

1966), pp. 126–27: ‘*En ell ago que está hacia abajo del Titicaca [...] allí termina la tierra. Ya no debe haber, más allá, algún pueblo, tampoco debe haber ningún resplandor.*’ The double pagination for this work refers to the original text (first) and to its Spanish translation by J. M. Arguedas (second).

⁶ P. Ondegardo, *El orden del Inca. Las contribuciones, distribuciones y la utilidad de guardar dicho orden (s. XVI)* (Lima: Commentarios, 2013), I A 2.12: ‘*después del Diluvio habían salido de una cueva que ellos llaman de Pacaritanbo, cinco leguas del Cuzco – donde está labrada antiquísimamente una ventana de cantería arrimada a un cerro que fue antiguo adoratorio suyo – siete personas, hombres y mujeres de los cuales se había multiplicado el mundo. En lo cual difieren, porque yo lo quise averiguar, y unos de ellos dicen que estos siete se salvaron en aquella cueva y otros que los crio nuevamente el Criador para que tornasen a multiplicar el mundo.*’

⁷ Y. Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind. Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 68, 87–88.

⁸ As does, for instance, García Escudero ‘El mundo de los muertos’, p. 6.

⁹ P. J. de Arriaga, *La extirpación de la idolatría en el Pirú (1621)* (Cuzco: Centro Bartolomé de las Casas, 1999), p. 76.

One of the most intriguing cross-cultural similarities can be found in the landscape of the underworld, which always features a body of water. It can take the form of a sea, lake, or river,¹⁰ but it always presents a considerable danger and a serious obstacle on the soul's way to its final destination. The ancient Greek underworld scenery looked strikingly similar, as far as can be gathered from written sources and pictorial representations.¹¹ Bodies of water visible on the surface were regarded as another (next to caves) form of entrances to the underworld – a belief which has survived until modern days: field research has shown that some communities currently consider the murmur of rivers at night-time to be the cry of screaming souls.¹² Springs were seen as end openings of subterranean passages, from which could emerge underworld creatures.

On the general level, the Incan concept of the other world is not dissimilar to those present in the ancient Mediterranean. However, the specific role of these elements and the way they feature in the grand scheme of life and death had a very particular focus in the Incan culture, where considerable emphasis is put on challenge. Death tends to be presented not as a natural event, occurring at a more or less expected moment to an individual experiencing it passively – it is rather seen as a task, which needs to be successfully completed in order for the soul to be able to enjoy afterlife.

The Journey

The transition from life to death takes the form of a journey – this may at first sight appear as a cliché, given the ubiquity of journey as metaphor of death in a myriad of cultures around the globe in all times. However, particular aspects of the Incan view of this journey reveal a complex, and in a way idiosyncratic, conceptualisation of the phenomenon of death and afterlife.

The journey is understood quite literally here: the soul wanders in the physical space between the spot where death occurred and its final resting place. The first difficulty it faces is the necessity to find the correct way. Symptomatically, this task becomes easier if the body of the deceased is buried within its *pacarina* – the land where its community originated. This

¹⁰ Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 76.

¹¹ K. Sekita, 'Do Not Talk Death to Me: The Epic Underworld', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Epic*, ed. by Emma Greensmith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), pp. 104–29. For a detailed analysis of the elements of the Orphic netherworld, based on texts from the so-called gold tablets, see A. Bernabé and A. I. Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Instructions for the Netherworld. The Orphic Gold Tablets* (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2007).

¹² García Escudero, 'El mundo de los muertos', p. 4, based on fieldwork carried out in Potosí, Bolivia, in 2006.

concept was very important to the Incas. Each *ayllu* (tribe) had a site which was believed to have been their specific point of origin (such as a mountain or a spring). They marked it with a figure representing the founding ancestor (an ancestral *huaca*), which they revered and sustained with offerings. This practice was deeply rooted in the Incan creation myth, according to which, since different peoples were meant to inhabit specific places, stone models were originally buried in the earth at different points – it is from these spots (such as the ground, mountains, springs, lagoons, tree trunks, etc.) that human beings emerged, which later became sacred for their descendants.¹³ Tribes were very attached to their place of origin and extremely reluctant to leave and lead their lives away from their *pacarina* – the sense of connection with their land was so strong that they would not relocate even if the terrain was very unfavourable and difficult to access and move about.¹⁴

This conviction allows us to make several important inferences regarding the Incan conceptualisation of death. The fact that the soul needs to find the right path indicates that the realm of the dead (as well as the way to it) was imagined as a real place, occupying physical space, analogical to the world of the living, and not as a purely metaphysical sphere, with no tangible points of reference (such as the Christian heaven or the Platonic realm of ideas). This route lay in the space between (and was clearly connected with) the world of the living and the final destination of the dead, which means that these two dimensions were conceived as physically communicated. The fact that burial within the *pacarina* facilitated the soul's navigation on its journey testifies to a parallelism between these two worlds: the paths travelled by the soul after death would be a reflection of the paths it covered in its lifetime. Additionally, it indicates a strong sense of the physical reality

¹³ B. Cobo, *Historia del nuevo mundo* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1956), xii.2, p. 151: '*Otros dicen que después que cesó el diluvio, en que pericieron todos, el Criador formó de barro en Tiaguanaco las naciones todas que hay en esta tierra, pintado a cada una el traje y vestido que había de tener; y que asimismo dió a cada nación la lengua que había de hablar, los cantares que había de cantar, y las comidas, semillas y legumbres con que había de sustentarse; y que, hecho esto, les mandó se sumiesen debajo de tierra, cada nación por sí, para que de allí fuesen a salir a las partes y lugares que él les mandase; y que unos salieron de suelos, otros de cerros, otros de fuentes, de lagunas, de troncos de árboles, y otros de otros diferentes lugares. A los cuales comenzaron a venerar, cada provincial el suyo, como "guacas" principales, por haber salido y empezado de allí su estirpe y linaje, y a tener por dioses aquellos sus primeros progenitores, poniendo sus imágenes y estatuas en los dichos lugares; y así cada nación se vestía con el traje que a su "guaca" pintaba. Cuentan más, que aquellos primeros hombres en aquellos mismos lugares, después de haber dejado sucesión se convirtieron, unos en piedras, otros en halcones, condors y otras aves y animales; y así son de diferentes figuras las "guacas" e ídolos que adoraban.*'

¹⁴ Arriaga, *Extirpación*, pp. 30, 74–75: '*Y ésta es una de las causas por que rehusan tanto la reducción de sus pueblos y gustan de vivir en unos sitios tan malos y trabajosos, que algunos he visto que era menester bajar por una agua cerca de una legua, y a muchos no se puede bajar ni subir si no es a pie, y la principal razón que dan es que está allí su Pacarina.*'

of the soul and its connection with the body: it is substantially attached to the body and is dependent on its state and location. Finally, the importance of proximity at the point of death/burial to the place of the community's origin attests to the conviction that after death the soul returns to the site where it first emerged.

Finding the right path is only one of the challenges the soul faces on its journey. Another major ordeal was the crossing of the water body: whether imagined as a sea, lake, or river, the Incan conception of a successful journey of the soul always involved crossing perilous water. The ways in which a soul could do it were quite inventive and often rather fantastic: solutions ranged from using an extremely thin bridge made of hair¹⁵ to being assisted by a well-disposed animal such as a dog, a caiman, spider, or a sea lion.¹⁶ With the exception of the dog, these animals were normally considered dangerous or at least disagreeable, and their participation in the soul's journey, in spite of their favourable disposition, adds further awe to the water-crossing challenge.

On its way, the soul of the deceased could also encounter hostile creatures, presenting considerable peril, such as anthropomorphic eagles (in the mountains of Cajamarca). Apart from hazards like this, during its journey, the soul was believed to suffer hunger, thirst, cold, tiredness, and loneliness.¹⁷ This again indicates that the soul was considered to be physical in nature, equipped with senses and perceptual capacity, which was apparently preserved at least in the initial stages of its transition from life to afterlife.

Balance – the Reason Behind the Journey

Portrayed as it is in our sources, the soul's journey to *hurin pacha*, with its challenges and precariousness, resembles a dire and gloomy obstacle course, which has to be completed if the deceased is to continue existence in the other world. Symptomatically, this obstacle course was not the same for everyone, but was subject to a complex system of hierarchies, relationships, and dependences.

In general, quite typically, those who led lives filled with good deeds, in harmony with their community, could expect an easier journey to the place of their afterlife than those who were guilty of wrongdoings. The

¹⁵ Arriaga, *Extirpación*, 76.

¹⁶ The sea lion (*lobo marino*) appears particularly on the coast: Arriaga records this for a town called Huacho, whose inhabitants cross after death to an island called Huano – Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 76.

¹⁷ M. De. Murúa, *Historia general del Perú [1613]* (Madrid: Historia 16, 1987), II.25, p. 235: 'las ánimas andaban vagas y solitarias y padecían hambre, sed y frío y cansancio'.

underlying conception was that a certain balance needs to be maintained in human actions and relationships on the cosmic level. If the earthly life is characterised by asymmetry, the equilibrium has to be restored during the transition to the other world: iniquity in life will have to be counter-balanced by a long and arduous journey after death. Particular challenges or obstacles the soul encounters on its way may reflect quite specifically the person's malpractice during life. An illustrative example is reported by Gose: the soul comes to a plain with large stone figures of dogs, said to be dog souls – anyone who mistreated dogs in life will be severely bitten or devoured.¹⁸

On a more general level, Allen observes that in death the balance is restored through the reversal of relationships of dominance and dependence:¹⁹ the more oppressive the person was in their lifetime, the more oppressed they will be during their journey to the afterlife. Many scholars see the roots of this belief in the vitality of equilibrium to life in the Andes: the austere habitat required people to maintain a balanced relationship with their environment as well as a system of exchange between communities living at different altitudes, which (through allowing access to different resources) enabled them to survive and prosper.²⁰ Equilibrium, guaranteeing equity of a static kind, needs to be complemented (and sustained) by exchange – a dynamic process ensuring mutual sharing of the available goods. This concept of balance and reciprocity, expressed in Quechua by the term *ayni*,²¹ was fundamental to the functioning of the universe and essential in the life of individuals and societies. In the larger scheme, it is often regarded as crucial to the creation and consolidation of the empire – presumably an underlying reason for the exceptional importance it had in the Incan cosmological and ethical view.²² As a result, the Andean conception of

¹⁸ P. Gose, *Deathly Waters and Hungry Mountains: Agrarian Ritual and Class Formation in an Andean Town* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 123–25.

¹⁹ C. J. Allen, 'When Utensils Revolt: Mind, Matter, and Modes of Being in the Pre-Columbian Andes', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 33 (1998), pp. 21–22.

²⁰ J. Murra, 'El "control vertical" de un máximo de pisos ecológicos en la economía de las sociedades andinas', in *Visita de la Provincia de León de Huánuco en 1562*, ed. by Ortiz de Zúñiga (Huánuco, Peru: Universidad Hermilio Valdizan, 1972), pp. 429–68. Murra speaks about 'vertical islands' – which resulted from the communities' efforts to maximise their access to a variety of resources – as well as 'vertical archipelagos' – which emerged as cooperation and exchange developed between these communities.

²¹ See D. González Holguín, *Vocabulario de la lengua general de todo del Perú llamada lengua Qquichua o del inca* (Lima: Francisco del Canto, 1608): s.v. *aynini* – 'to recompense'. English translations of Quechua terms used in the present work follow this Quechua–Spanish dictionary as the most extensive one from the period.

²² Classen, *Cosmology and Body*, pp. 1–2, 11.

human self has been described as the node of a complex intersection of relationships, and the notion of being – as the act of balancing them.²³

A natural question to ask would be whether it is possible to restore balance even in the case of most extreme asymmetries. Notably, the answer is negative. People who have committed a gross violation of reciprocity in their relations with the community cannot undergo complete separation of the soul from the body. As a result, their souls become imprisoned in their decomposing bodies, which makes them unable to complete their post-mortem journey. This state of souls entrapped in rotting bodies clearly aroused the Incan imagination, which created quite a vivid picture of these souls roaming high glaciers as *kukuchis*, strikingly resembling modern zombies: they are in constant search of human flesh, which they feed on.²⁴

Assistance of the Living

The Incan conception of the soul's journey after death shaped the way the society approached death and the deceased: the burial ritual, offerings for the dead, as well as communication with them. According to most chronicles, burial was prescribed to be performed five days after death,²⁵ as this was believed to be the time of the soul's travel, described as the period of darkness of the soul, or of separation of the soul from the body. During this time, in a ritual called *Pacaricuc*,²⁶ the body was guarded, particularly during the night, with the accompaniment of dirges, sung either in chorus or solo with the rest of the people responding. Attention was paid to any signs of the soul visiting the living. Lest its presence be missed, flour or ashes were scattered on the floor to make detection of its movement possible, by spotting a trail²⁷ – another testimony to the physical nature of the soul in the Incan imagination.

²³ Allen, 'Utensils', p. 23, based on her analysis of Andean narratives, where (in her view) community and individuals are represented as entities held together by balanced relations of domination, subservience, and interdependence.

²⁴ Allen, 'Utensils', pp. 23–24.

²⁵ Number 5 was associated with the life–death sphere in general. This is clearly illustrated by its occurrence in such contexts in Ávila, *Huarochiri*: seeds sown rise in five days (p. 20/21), the mythological deluge lasted five days (p. 32/33), the sun died for five days (p. 34/36), the deceased used to return to life after five days in ancient times (p. 154/155).

²⁶ The word *pacaric* means 'what is reborn', 'what returns' – L. C. Keating, *The Extirpation of Idolatry in Peru, by Father Pablo Joseph de Arriaga* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), p. 56 n. 3.

²⁷ Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 66: '*Hacen el Pacaricuc, que es velar toda la noche, cantando endechas con voz muy lastimosa; unas veces a coros y otras cantando uno y respondiendo todos los demás, cierran la puerta por donde sacaron al difunto y no se sirven más de ella. Esparcen*

What could the living do in order to assist the soul on its challenging journey? Although its nature and degree of difficulty was determined by the individual's status and deeds during earthly life, there were ways in which the challenge could be made easier to complete. First of all, since finding the correct route could present a difficulty in an unfamiliar territory (as has been shown above), a major facilitation could come from burial within the native land of the community the individual belonged to – the *pacarina* – as this would ensure the soul was navigating through well-known paths. A good (even if rather extreme) illustration of how essential this condition was considered to be is that the Incas would go as far as disinterring the bodies of their deceased kinsmen and placing them to rest within their land.²⁸

Further, interment of the deceased together with their possessions and other helpful objects would allow the soul to use them when/if needed. The dead individual was dressed in new clothes, or they were placed next to the body, folded up and ready to be put on.²⁹ Cobo and Santillan assert that the Incas placed in the sepulchres the best possessions of the deceased and went as far as committing homicide in order to provide servants for their dead.³⁰

Finally, offerings made to the dead in the form of food and drink provided nourishment, sustaining and strengthening the travelling spirit, which otherwise suffered thirst, hunger, and tiredness. It was believed that during its journey the soul could return to this world specifically in order to get some food and drink, so the rituals connected with death accommodated this need: the Incas offered wine to the returning soul

en algunas partes harina de maíz o de quinua por la casa para ver, como ellos dicen, si vuelve el difunto por las pisadas que ha de dejar señaladas en la harina.

²⁸ Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 67. Murúa, *Historia general*, II.25, p. 236: '*aunque traían los difuntos a enterrar en las iglesias y cementerios, después de noche volvían y los desenterraban secretamente, sin que llegase a noticia e sus curas, y los llevaban a sus huacas, o a los cerros y pampas donde estaban sus antepasados y en las sepulturas antiguas, o en las casas de los difuntos, y allí los guardaban para darles a su tiempo de comer y beber.*'

²⁹ Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 66: '*debajo de la mortaja les suelen vestir vestidos nuevos, y otras veces se los ponen doblados, sin vestírselos.*'

³⁰ B. Cobo, *Historia del nuevo mundo* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1956), XIII.3, pp. 153–54: '*el cuidado grande que tenían de prevenir y adornar sus sepulturas; en meter con el difunto todos sus haberes, mujeres y servicio y cantidad de comida y bebida*'; XIII.2, p. 163: '*Tomaban asimismo todos sus bienes muebles, vajillas y servicio de oro y plata, y sin dar desto cosa a los herederos, parte ponían con el difunto y parte enterraban en los lugares donde solía recibir recreación cuando vivía.*' H. de Santillan, 'Relación del origen, descendencia, política y gobierno de los Incas', in *Crónicas peruanas de interés indígena*, ed. by F. Esteve Barba (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1968), pp. 97–149, 113: '*les ponían a los muertos todo lo mejor que tenían, porque creían que como salían de acá así habían de parecer sus ánimas allá donde iban; y mataban indios e indias, y echábanlos con los que enterraban, para que fuesen a servirlos.*'

during watch nights as well as placed elaborately prepared food on graves.³¹ Other offerings could be connected to particular tasks awaiting the soul on the journey: dedications of human hair, for instance, would help the souls cross the water through a bridge made of hair.³²

Overall, the rituals performed by the living as well as the objects they included in the sepulchre were meant to equip the soul of the deceased as well as possible for its journey to the other world. However, the assistance the soul obtained thus was not the sole, or even the most important, factor determining the completion of the challenge, which strongly depended on the soul's qualities. In theory, these qualities were supposed to be understood in ethical terms: as characteristics which enabled the individual to lead a good life, filled with good deeds. Nevertheless, in reality, they were often identified with social status: those of higher social standing were considered morally better and generally more worthy than those lower in the social hierarchy. This fallacious equation of status with value was noted and criticised by chroniclers, who also came from hierarchical societies.³³

Incan Ghosts

The five-day period between the death of the body and the arrival of the soul at its final destination is an intriguing and imagination-stirring concept. During this time people gathered around the body, singing dirges and watching for any signs of the soul coming to visit the living. It could appear as a likeness of the person while alive – a form which we would today call a ghost. Alternatively, and more thrillingly, it could take the form of just the head of the deceased.³⁴

³¹ Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 66: 'y esperan cantando y bebiendo toda la noche siguiente al ánima del difunto, que dicen que ha de venir a comer y a beber, y cuando están ya tomados del vino dicen que viene el ánima y le ofrecen, derramándole mucho vino'; p. 67: 'Echanles muy disimuladamente chicha en la sepultura para que beban, y muy a descubierto ponen, cuando les hacen las honras comidas cocidas y asadas sobre la sepultura para que coman.'

³² C. A. Suarez and J. J. George, *Handbook to Life in the Inca World* (New York: Facts on File, 2011), p. 150.

³³ Cobo, *Historia*, XIII.3, p. 155: 'dado que convenían en que los malos se condenaban y los buenos se salvaban, no acertaban a señalar y distinguir los buenos de los malos. Porque les persuadió el demonio que los nobles y gente de calidad, aunque fueses de costumbres depravadas, eran siempre buenos y no era posible poderse condenar; proque el infierno sole era para los hombres bajos y sin calidad, como ladrones y gente pobre, para los hechiceros que mataban con yerbas y para otros deste género, y señaladamente para los que iban contra los mandatos del rey o decían mal del sol y de las "guacas"; en los cuales pecados no incurrián los del linaje de los Incas, que eran los nobles; no haciendo caso de las otras especies de pecados.'

³⁴ Murúa, *Historia general*, II.25, p. 235: 'las cabezas de los difuntos, o sus fantasmas, andaban visitando sus hijos y parientes y otras personas conocidas'.

This image becomes even more horrifying if we consider the purpose of the soul's visit. According to the Incas, the souls of the deceased could come to warn or impart knowledge to the living, but this knowledge could regard undesirable events due to happen, such as someone's death;³⁵ they could also request company in their underworld journey, which would naturally imply the death of that person. Since these visitations were seen as not necessarily favourable to the living, and could even be directly harmful, it does not surprise that the Incas believed that it is in the interest of the living to assist the travelling soul on its underworld journey. The fear of returning souls has been postulated as the actual reason underlying the practice of making offerings to the dead: the living should ensure that the dead are satisfied and wanting nothing for which they may be tempted to come back.³⁶

The idea of a ghost making an appearance to select someone from among the living to accompany him/her to the underworld is rather chilling. However, the image of the *kukuchis*, mentioned above, seems even more spooky. The transition of the soul to the underworld was supposed to be completed within five days, after which was performed the ritual washing and farewell.³⁷ If this failed, the soul became a wandering phantom, a revenant, condemned to eternal roaming in search of food, which in this case was human flesh.

This element of Incan imagination of afterlife has several important aspects. It indicates a strong sense of connection between the two dimensions, the *kay pacha* and the *hurin pacha* – human deeds and behaviour during their lifetime heavily impacted their ability to attain afterlife: imbalance in their relationship with the community resulted in a long and arduous journey, and certain transgressions would preclude the privilege of afterlife entirely. It also introduces an element of horror: the eternally wandering zombie-like phantoms incite fear and disgust, constituting a warning to the living and a strong incentive to lead a virtuous life in harmony with the community.

Death's Mysterious Timing

One of the most peculiar features of the Incan underworld journey is its temporal framework. We have seen that from the point of view of the living,

³⁵ Murúa, *Historia general*, II.25, p. 235: '*andaban visitando sus hijos y parientes y otras personas conocidas, en señal que han de morir presto o les ha de suceder algún mal*'.

³⁶ A. De Tuya, 'Las Ceremonias a la Muerte del Inca, en el Perú Precolombino', *Anthropos*, 32.1/2 (1937), pp. 147–54, 149.

³⁷ Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 67 reports that after five days the Incas carried the clothes of the deceased to the river in order to wash them.

this journey lasts five days – this is the time when the body of the deceased is lying in the open, awaiting the final washing and farewell. However, it seems that the duration of the journey is not the same when viewed from the perspective of the soul. The oral tradition has preserved a story about a boy who went through a mountain portal and entered a system of subterranean tunnels – he emerged a year later in a different location.³⁸ Even though the boy did not die (or especially because of that), he would not be able to survive roaming around without food and drink for a year. This implies that the passage of time for the boy while in the tunnels was much slower, most probably counted in days, while on earth his absence lasted a year. Analogical situation must be taking place during the souls' journey after death.

This shows a temporal logic which would make Einstein smile: the passage of time is clearly conceived of as relative. Even though the time relations between the dimensions seem to be reversed here (it is the travelling soul – but not the living boy! – who is experiencing the faster passage of time, while the living continue with time passing at a slower rate), this concept evokes the principles of the theory of relativity. The main difference here is that the temporal extension depends not on any physical or cosmic laws but on the morality and individual features of the soul.

Such a representation of the soul's journey suggests that the Incas conceived of its end point, the *hurin pacha*, as located in a different dimension: the soul is travelling to its new reality not only through space, where it needs to find the correct path, but also through time. This shows the complexity of the concept of *pacha*, which is usually translated as 'world' or 'earth' and commonly understood in terms of space: as an area where beings spend their life or afterlife. Scholars are mainly preoccupied with identifying the locations of these worlds in the Incan descriptions. However, it seems that it is more adequate to consider it in terms of space-time: as a dimension in which can take place one or another form of being. A good illustration of such meaning of this term is its application by Pachacuti Yamqui in his account of different ages in the history of humanity: he mentions *purunpacha* and *ccallacpacha* as epochs constituting consequent stages in the development of the human race.³⁹

³⁸ García Escudero, 'El mundo de los muertos', p. 5.

³⁹ J. de. Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamayhua, 'Relación de Antigüedades deste Reyno del Perú', in *Crónicas peruanas de interés indígena*, ed. by F. Esteve Barba (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1968), p. 282: '*Dizen que en tiempo de purunpacha todas las naciones de Tauantinsuyo benieron de hacia arriba de Potossi tres o cuatro exercitos en forma de Guerra, y así los benieron poblando, tomando los lugares, quedandose cada uno de los compañías en los lugares baldíos; a este tiempo se llaman ccallacpacha o tutayachacha; y como cada uno cogieron lugares baldíos para sus beuendas u moradas, esto se llaman purunpacha raccaptin, este tiempo.*'

Final Destination

At the completion of this quest, the soul would attain its aim: the final destination, where it would carry on existing. Characteristically, the state in which its existence was continued was not the same for everyone: according to the Incas, there were various forms of afterlife, and which of them befell a given individual depended on a number of factors. A limited category of chosen ones who lived their lives well could be transformed into stars in the sky.⁴⁰ On the other side of the spectrum were newborn babies who died unacknowledged by the community and/or buried without their placenta – they were turned into evil spirits inhabiting *hurin pacha*, as the placenta was considered to be the home of the newborn, containing its soul. Other fortunes included becoming an inhabitant of mountain peaks in the case of warriors, a ‘common traveller’ leading a life similar to that from before death.⁴¹ According to Arriaga, most Incas did not expect anything more than that: they said that in the beyond they were going to work on their farms and crop fields.⁴²

Another possibility was transformation into an animal. This form of afterlife seems to be very much dependent on the evaluation of the individual’s life and could entail a fragmentary transfiguration, involving only some body parts. These metamorphoses were determined by morality and were deeply rooted in the beliefs and perceptions prevailing in the community: wrongdoers turned into serpents or animals which sting/bite or poisonous ones (e.g. bumblebee), quarrelsome individuals became foxes, and good people turned into birds or flies – animals associated with flight and the sky.

This overview shows that the most desired final destination was the sky: the souls of the deceased were always aiming upwards, towards *hanan pacha* (upper world). Their endeavours often involved a literal ascent, such as climbing a mountain.⁴³ The vertical direction of this movement, corresponding to the arrangement of the three worlds, reflects a vertical conceptualisation of space, which might have been determined by the shape of the landscape the Incas were surrounded by. Its most conspicuous feature

⁴⁰ Cobo, *Historia*, XIII.3, p. 154: ‘*Algunos creían que, salida el alma del cuerpo, si había vivido bien, se hacía estrella, y que de allí procedían todas las del cielo, y que allí gozaban de gloria.*’ Ávila, *Huarochirí*, pp. 162–63 mentions stars which are *huacas* – compare with the discussion of metamorphosis below.

⁴¹ García Escudero, ‘El mundo de los muertos’, p. 9, based on fieldwork carried out in Potosí, Bolivia, in 2006.

⁴² Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 76: ‘Y así dicen que van hacer allá sus chácaras y sementeras.’

⁴³ García Escudero, ‘El mundo de los muertos’, p. 7, based on fieldwork carried out by Zulma Rosis Pinaya and Patricia Fuertes in Tuysuri, Tinquipaya, Potosí, Bolivia, 2006.

are the Andes – a mountain range averaging 4,000 m and reaching almost 7,000 m in height, which extends in the form of a long belt (8,900 km) between the Pacific Ocean to the west and tropical rainforest to the east. The sharp increase in altitude over a small distance is combined with the fact that a multitude of micro- and macro-ecosystems are tightly packed in this area in a ‘compact vertical arrangement, which is not duplicated anywhere on the planet’.⁴⁴ By necessity, lives of communities took place in and by the mountains, always in their vicinity and in relation to them. It is only natural that mountains appeared to them as points of communication between this world and the upper world, and that climbing them was the surest way of reaching the sky.

Not everyone would manage to achieve this sublime destination – it was actually believed that only few would. But souls would aim for it, especially those of high social status. According to Cobo’s account, the first Inca ruler Manco Cápac, feeling that death was approaching, said that it was time to turn towards the sky, to where his father sun was calling him.⁴⁵

Metamorphosis

The last of the alternative kinds of afterlife listed above which the Incan dead could experience is the most complex one. Apart from being turned into animals, individuals could undergo a transformation into objects and remain in *kay pacha* as *huacas* – entities which contained the soul of a dead individual, usually an exceptional person. Souls of important ancestors often underwent petrification and the resulting stones were placed on the ground, in the middle of the field, which was supposed to signify the ownership and fertility of the territory.⁴⁶ This practice was deeply rooted in the belief that human beings are created out of earth or rock, which is reflected in the term *allpa camasca* (animated earth).⁴⁷ Once life comes to an end, souls can return to their lithic forms and continue their existence within them. Pierre Duviols captures the dichotomic symbolism of lithomorphosis by presenting

⁴⁴ T. N. D’Altroy, *The Incas* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 33.

⁴⁵ Cobo, *Historia*, xii.4, p. 66: ‘Llegado ya a mucha vejez, cuando conoció se acercaba su muerte, mandó llamar ante sí los principales de su estado, y díjoles cómo ya era tiempo de volverse al Cielo, para donde le llamaba su padre el sol.’

⁴⁶ P. Duviols, ‘Un simbolismo de la ocupación, el ordenamiento y la explotación del espacio: el monolito “huanca” y su función en los Andes prehispánicos’, in *Escritos de Historia Andina*, ed. by J. Flores and C. Itier (Lima: Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2016), pp. 175–206.

⁴⁷ G. de la Vega, *Comentarios reales de los Incas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1945), ii.7, p. 79: ‘Tuvieron los Incas amautas que el hombre era compuesto de cuerpo y ánima, y que el ánima era espíritu inmortal y que el cuerpo era hecho de tierra, porque le veían convertirse en ella, y así le llamaban Allpacamasca, que quiere dezir tierra animada.’

such rocks as doubles – embodying the earth-bound nature of human condition, but at the same time constituting a vessel enabling continuation of their existence in eternity.⁴⁸

In Cobo's account of the creation myth quoted above, this lithic origin of the human race is intrinsically connected with the concept of *pacarina*, mentioned above: human beings emerge from stone models buried in the ground in different places – these spots are subsequently marked with shrines by their descendants, who venerate their place of origin and the founders of their respective tribes as *huacas*. The deeply rooted connection of individuals and communities to their ancestors' birthplace had weighty implications on the socio-administrative level: it facilitated maintaining an even distribution of population across an unevenly favourable territory, which maximised resource exploitation and aided government. This must have been of vital importance in a landscape characterised by striking complexity and peculiarity: the area inhabited by the Incas was a narrow band along the Pacific Ocean within which lay compressed 'the highest peaks in the western hemisphere, a coastal desert that may go for years without rain, and dense tropical jungles' – the land contained an enormous variety of productive micro-environments.⁴⁹

What did the stones containing petrified souls look like? The variety of their forms we encounter reflects their symbolic nature, referring to essential features of these entities and the underlying conceptions. They were often anthropomorphic (and occasionally zoomorphic) but sculpted only partially or allusively, often in volcanic rock. They could be shiny or even glowing,⁵⁰ which made them look rather unusual. However, more striking were those which took the shape of the human head with a terrifying appearance, or those in the form of human skull.⁵¹ The horror involved in these representations is notable and clearly intended.

Apart from *huacas* marking ancestral birthplaces, there were also a multitude of others, displayed in a variety of locations. Characteristically, they were often put in remote places, very difficult to access: at high

⁴⁸ P. Duviols, 'Un simbolismo andino del doble: la litomorfosis del ancestro', in *Escritos de Historia Andina*, ed. by J. Flores and C. Itier (Lima: Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2016), pp. 167–74, esp. 168–70.

⁴⁹ D'Altroy, *The Incas*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ P. Duviols, *Procesos y Visitas de Idolatrias. Cajatambo, Siglo XVII* (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, Fondo Editorial Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2003), p. 171: '*eran dos piedras redondas de color de huevo de perdiz y resplandecian como unos gusanillos que llaman luzernas y en su lengua llipiac hina*'.

⁵¹ Duviols, *Procesos*, p. 740: '*en un adoratorio rodeado de cantería y en medio hecho un caracol, estaba su [de Llacoy] respetada y principal huaca llamada Llamoc, que era una piedra a modo de una calavera, tan pesada como fiera, que mirarla ponía horror*'.

altitudes⁵² or in spots which could be reached only with the use of climbing skills. Some required also climbing equipment, such as ropes. One of the sources describes a site located high on a mountain, where those intending to make a dedication to the *huaca* had to climb on a rope while holding their offering in their mouth – an activity which not only demanded skill and fitness, but also involved risking one’s life, as the author stresses.⁵³

The physical form of *huacas* as well their place of display seems to have been meant to create a particular effect. Their appearance was not aimed for a realistic representation but rather intended to induce horror in the viewer. The life risk often involved in accessing them in turn exposed the dedicators to a near-death experience. Altogether, contact with *huacas* would make death feel real in the human imagination – it could have constituted a form of initiation into death and dying.

The term *huaca* has a signification much broader than an object containing a transformed soul. Etymologically, it means ‘split, in-between’ or ‘double’. It was often used to refer to a place, particularly one with special qualities making it suitable for a point of contact between this and other worlds, such as a mountain, a spring, a cave, or even a building. Such places were regarded as cracks in reality or mediating spaces between the natural and the supernatural. In its meaning of ‘double’, it referred to an entity which existed at two levels at once – for instance, a petrified soul of a dead individual would partake in both the world of the living and the dead. Thus, the term grew to signify a liminal zone between categories and as such was regarded as a place of hazard by the Incas.⁵⁴ Natural formations or creatures of remarkable appearance or features were likely to be called *huaca* and to be venerated by the community, to which they were potentially beneficial,⁵⁵ but could equally well become harmful. In the case of places, this would often mean beautiful locations which were at the same time difficult and perilous to access. *Huaca* rocks or statues in turn, as beings straddling the division between this and the other world, could impart useful knowledge to the living – this would usually happen through the mediation of diviners or Inca rulers, who were endowed with the ability to converse with *huacas*. At the same time, *huacas* could turn against human

⁵² Mount Aconcagua (6,971 m), the highest peak in the Americas, was just one of more than 50 mountains where the Incas built a shrine near the summit – D’Altroy, *The Incas*, p. 35.

⁵³ C. Itier, “‘Huaca’, un concepto andino mal entendido”, *Chungará*, 53.3 (2001), p. 482.

⁵⁴ Classen, *Cosmology and Body*, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Vega, *Comentarios*, 11.4, p. 72: ‘También dan el mismo nombre a todas aquellas cosas que en hermosura o excelencia se aventajan de las otras de su especie, como una rosa, mangana o camuesa o cualquiera otra fruta que sea mayor y más hermosa que todas las de su árbol; y a los árboles que hazen la misma ventaja a los de su especie le dan el mismo nombre.’

beings and even hurt them: an extreme case is reported by a seventeenth-century chronicler, where a *huaca* was trying to control a man by blinding him with light and making his ears ring.⁵⁶

The idea that a soul could be contained in an object such as a stone bears affinity to panpsychism: a conviction that all material things have associated awareness or mental properties, even if symptoms of this may not be clearly manifest to us, as beings differ in the level of complexity of their consciousness.⁵⁷ The principles and intricacies of this philosophical view have been explored and propagated in the modern age by writers and thinkers such as Ernst Mach and William James in the nineteenth century or Bertrand Russell and Arthur Eddington in the twentieth century. However, its examples can be found in a multitude of ancient cultures, where the world was believed to be full of water, tree, and mountain spirits, making the entire nature an animate and presumably conscious being. Recent scholarly publications show that panpsychism can also be seen as underlying many philosophical views and theories developed across centuries in a variety of cultures.⁵⁸ Taylor has observed that to the Andeans, the animated world extends much further than its Western equivalent: anything that has a function or a purpose is animate so that its function or purpose can be fulfilled, and this applies to fields, mountains, and rocks in the same way as it does to human beings.⁵⁹

Body–soul Fluidity

The progressive (as opposed to instantaneous) nature of death in the Incan world is accompanied by (and harmonises with) considerable fluidity of the boundary between the body and the soul. On the one hand, the process of dying assumes separation of the soul from its body so that it can make its journey to the afterlife: human bodies were generally conceived of as heavy, restricted, bound to earth, and divided into parts, while souls were light, unbound by physical restrictions, and indivisible. However, on the other hand, the features and faculties of the deceased body and the eternal soul seem far from disjointed.

Since the bodies are made of earth and earth itself is sacred and alive, according to the Incas, it follows that material bodies were believed to have

⁵⁶ Classen, *Cosmology and Body*, pp. 7, 131–32.

⁵⁷ S. Blackmore, *Consciousness. An Introduction* (London: Hodder Education, 2010), pp. 12, 221.

⁵⁸ The most relevant and wide-reaching is W. Seager, *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁵⁹ Taylor, “Camay”, “camac” et “camasca”, p. 235.

a spiritual presence of their own, which they retained even after death – hence skeletons and mummies were objects of veneration and power.⁶⁰

Additionally, bodies of the deceased seem to preserve some functions which strike as pertaining to living beings. For instance, during the annual purificatory rite called *Situa*, mummified bodies of ancestors were bathed and rubbed with corn alongside the living, as if they too were susceptible to diseases and misfortunes which could befall living beings.⁶¹ Physical sensation was believed to be located in the bones and to remain there after death, as they were seen as a lasting bodily part – hence, the use of bones of enemies as drinking vessels or flutes was meant to have a direct as well as symbolic effect on them. Arriaga notes that, according to the Incas, dead bodies retained not only sensation but also the ability to take in food and drink.⁶²

Souls in turn preserve some bodily functions and faculties. As has been mentioned above, they feel thirst, hunger, and cold on their journey. The remedy comes from food and drink offerings made by the living, which the souls are apparently able to consume as they would when alive.⁶³ Moreover, they must retain some materiality, at least to a minimal degree, as the *Pacaricuc* ritual, described above, indicates: a soul visiting this world during its afterlife journey could leave footprints, or some other sort of tracks, which could be trailed by the living. Besides, preservation of the dead body was considered crucial for the ability of the soul to complete its journey. An illustrative confirmation of the strength of this conviction as well as an extreme example of compliance with this requirement is the story of the last Inca ruler, Atahualpa, who, when captured by the Spanish conquistadors and sentenced to death, agreed to be baptised in order to be executed by means of the garrotte instead of burning at the stake.⁶⁴ This precondition

⁶⁰ Classen, *Cosmology and Body*, p. 30.

⁶¹ Cobo, *Historia*, XIII.29, p. 218: *‘Asimismo sacaban los cuerpos de los señores Muertos los que de su linaje los tenían a cargo, y los lavaban en los baños que solían ellos usar cuando eran vivos; y vueltos a sus casas, los untaban con el dicho sanco y les ponían delante las comidas que cuando vivían con más gusto solían comer; y las personas que cuidaban de los dichos muertos, las quemaban.’* The *sanco* mentioned in this passage is described earlier in Cobo’s text as a kind of corn pulp: *‘una mazamorra de maíz mal molido’*.

⁶² Arriaga, *Extirpación*, p. 76: *‘Están persuadidos que los cuerpos muertos sienten, comen y beben.’*

⁶³ Cobo, *Historia*, XIII.3, p. 154 testifies to this conviction: *‘y así tenían tanto cuidado de ofrecer de comer y beber a sus muertos, mayormente a los cuerpos embalsamados de los señores, hablando con ellos como si estuvieran vivos y diciéndoles: “Cuando eras vivo solías comer y beber destes manjares y bebidas; recíbalo ahora tu ánima y cómalo doquiera que estuviere.” Y tenían por cierto que así pasaba, que dondequiera que las ánimas estaban recibían y comían los manjares que les ofrecían, como hacían antes que muriesen.’*

⁶⁴ Classen, *Cosmology and Body*, p. 114.

for achieving afterlife proved to be overriding any other ritual directive and more potent than any sense of religious belief or belonging – changing religion seemed a lesser threat to the soul's afterlife than the complete destruction of the body.

Finally, *huacas* clearly straddled the body–soul division, as they existed on the material and spiritual level at the same time: they had to be attended to in a very much bodily way (e.g. ritual feeding), but at the same time they contained the souls of the deceased and could exercise supernatural powers. The complex bodily/spiritual nature of *huacas* is perhaps best illustrated by the extraordinary story recorded by Pachacuti Yamqui: when a *huaca* is called upon in a dark hut, his spirit enters with the sound of the wind, indicating its transcendental nature; however, when light is let into the hut, the *huaca* immediately hides his face, starts shouting, and runs away in fear that people may see his face and figure, which turn out to be awful: large in size, with an ugly face, thick curly hair, and smelling badly.⁶⁵ In spite of being spiritual and powerful in nature, the *huaca* was clearly susceptible to the feeling of shame and fear connected with his physical appearance – and looking deceptively human and corporeal in that.

Death as a Process

The centrality of the soul's journey to the Incan conception of afterlife as well as the fluidity in the division of faculties between human body and soul indicates that death was essentially understood as a process, and not an instantaneous event. Dying happens gradually, in stages, which is reflected in Quechua vocabulary: the word used to refer to the dead, *wañuq*, actually means 'those who are dying'.⁶⁶ After the transition of the spirit to the other world has been completed, the term applied to the dead changed to *aya*, which means the physical body separated from the spirit.⁶⁷ It must be noted, however, that this transition was never complete, which is manifest in the body–soul fluidity discussed above. Death does not happen as an abrupt end, but rather progresses gradually as a shift of balance between the animate and the inanimate, the material and the spiritual. As Urioste puts it, 'pre-conquest Andeans thought of death not as the end of life but as a new stage in the process of becoming'.⁶⁸ This way of transitioning

⁶⁵ Pachacuti Yamqui, *Relación*, p. 292: '*la figura era tan feo y de mal olor, y cabellos muy gruesos y crespos y muy espantoso de talle*'.

⁶⁶ G. Urioste, 'Sickness and Death in Preconquest Andean Cosmology: The Huarochirí Oral Tradition', in *Health in the Andes*, ed. by J. W. Bastien and J. M. Donahue (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1981), pp. 9–18, 15.

⁶⁷ González Holguín, *Vocabulario, s.v. aya*.

⁶⁸ Urioste, 'Sickness and Death', p. 15.

from the earthly life to the beyond seems to be an exceptional privilege enjoyed only by human beings among all the creation: dead animals, in contrast, were called *wañusqa*, which means ‘having been affected by death (permanently)’.⁶⁹

This process of dying, as presented in the sources, is demanding and strenuous, both for the dying individual and for the living who are left behind. The soul is facing the numerous challenges of the journey to its final destination discussed above. The living, in turn, apart from remaining in the state of natural grief, are exposed to the threat of the returning soul as well as to all the risks entailed in the contact with a dead body (which is actually still in the course of dying) – a non-minor peril for the Incas. The smell of decay was regarded as the worst of all⁷⁰ and contact with corpses was believed to cause contamination and diseases. One of them was called *ayapcha oncoycona* (cadaver sickness) by Guaman Poma.⁷¹ Thus, both the soul and the body of a deceased in the process of transition to the other world constituted a potential health hazard or even a life threat to the living.

However, once the process of dying has been completed, or at least reached an advanced stage, the situation changed both for the dead individual and for those alive: the soul has accomplished its goal and found its final destination, or completed its metamorphosis, so is now at rest; the body in turn has become dry (as the flesh disintegrated and only bones remain) or has been made dry in the process of mummification (by draining body fluids), which also removes the smell of putrefaction.⁷² As a result, contact with the deceased body at this stage is safe and can even be beneficial. Pachacuti Yamqui speaks about medicinal properties of the seed coming from a tree which had a dead body buried in it: the medicine produced from it is called *villca*, and it was believed to drive out all the bad moods and anger of people.⁷³

⁶⁹ Urioste, ‘Sickness and Death’, p. 15.

⁷⁰ Classen, *Cosmology and Body*, pp. 74–75.

⁷¹ F. Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El primer nueva crónica y buen gobierno [ca. 1613]* (Madrid: Historia 16, 1987), p. 253 [255]. References to this work will be made with double pagination, following the system assumed by most editors: the first number refers to pages in the original manuscript, and the number in square brackets refers to the consecutive numbering of pages, accounting for the errors and duplications made by the author.

⁷² Cobo, *Historia*, XIII.10, p. 163 was impressed not only by the fact that the smell can be removed completely but also by the durability of a body which underwent such process of mummification: ‘*Para esto, en saliendo el ánima del cuerpo, lo tomaban los de su aylo y parcialidad, y si era rey o gran señor, lo embalsamaban y curaban con gran artificio, de suerte que se pudiese conservar entero sin oler mal ni corromperse por muchos años; y duraban algunos desde modo más de doscientos.*’

⁷³ Pachacuti Yamqui, *Relación*, p. 297: ‘*Y les haze que enterrase junto a un arbol y los cabase al tronco de la madera, para meter a todo su cuerpo en ella; y les dize que el grano que*

At that point, the body also enters the universal cycle, in which death of one organism is the source of fertility for the next beings to come. Burials within tree trunks were the clearest and most literal illustration of the Incan belief in this cycle of life, which gave them the feeling of being included in the life of the cosmos. In the story by Pachacuti Yamqui mentioned above, a warrior was lamenting that he was going to die fruitless, but his body was buried in a tree, which produced fruit with healing powers, *villca*.⁷⁴ This belief in the cyclicity of life was deeply rooted in Incan mythology, where Pachacamac (The Animator of the World) killed his half-brother and scattered pieces of his body over the land to create food – and indeed, corn grew out of the teeth, tubers grew out of bones, and fruits and vegetables grew out of his flesh.⁷⁵ It was also reflected in the Quechua vocabulary: bodies of the ancestors were often referred to as *mallqui* ('young plant'), which bears upon the concept of an ending life giving a beginning to a new life – a continuity of matter as well as of time.⁷⁶ As a result of this view, creation was understood by the Incas not as making *ex nihilo*, but rather as bringing new beings into existence through re-structuring matter and giving it new identity through animation. This power to re-order and animate matter was expressed by the term *kamay*.⁷⁷ Garcilaso de la Vega states emphatically that the term Pachacamac should not be translated as Creator but rather as Animator: he who gives the world a soul, or he who does to the world what the soul does to the body.⁷⁸ Thus, as the Incan soul is far from behaving like a Christian one, so is the Incan Maker: he brings beings to life by sending a spirit, which can enter and exit given matter.

Summary

In conclusion, the most conspicuous and defining feature of the Incan conceptualisation of death and afterlife is the all-encompassing fluidity and connectivity. Death is not an instantaneous event but an extended process of gradual transition to a different state. The shift does not happen

echare el arbol seria medicina llamado villca, y que los echaria todos los malos humores y cóleras de las personas.'

⁷⁴ See note above.

⁷⁵ Classen, *Cosmology and Body*, p. 107.

⁷⁶ González Holguín, *Vocabulario, s.v. mallqui*: '1. Delicate plant for planting (seedling); 2. Fruit tree.' Classen, *Cosmology and Body*, pp. 89–90.

⁷⁷ Taylor, "'Camay", "camac" et "camasca"', pp. 231–44.

⁷⁸ Vega, *Comentarios*, II.2, p. 66: '*Pachacámac: es nombre compuesto de Pacha, que es mundo universo, y de Cámac, participio de presente del verbo cama, que es animar, el cual verbo se deduce del nombre cama, que es ánima. Pachacámac quiere dezir el que da ánima al mundo universo, y en toda su propia y entera significación quiere dezir el que haze con el universo lo que el ánima con el cuerpo.*'

to a passively experiencing it individual, but rather constitutes a personal challenge: the soul undertakes a demanding and strenuous journey, which is crucial to its survival in the beyond. This active view, in which humans have agency in their process of dying, is central to the Incan conception of death. By extension, it entails the belief in the preservation of consciousness in the beyond: the souls clearly remain self-aware and react with purpose and will to their surroundings, both within this world and without.

The gradual nature of the transition from earthly life to afterlife implicates fluidity of the ontological status of the human body and soul throughout the process: detachment between them progresses until they are both transformed and participating in afterlife in a new form. The body retains certain features which it had during life and preserves the spiritual (and divine) grain which is the subject of worship; the soul in turn remains partly material and perceptual.

In the Incan world, life and death were conceived of at the cosmic level. The human spirit, freed from the limitations of the body, has the ability to move between cosmic dimensions, arranged vertically in reflection of the Andean landscape. It remains in connectivity with the living in the form of mutual support, dependence, and conditioning. The body also partakes in the unity of life forms, as it enters the cycle of life in which the disintegration of one being provides substance and fertility for the emergence of another being – a continuity of matter as well as time.

The cosmic and the particular remain in lasting interrelation and interdependence. One of the peculiarities of Incan afterlife is its diversity: the scope of variations and alternatives of possible routes, obstacles, locations, transformations, and afterlife forms, as well as the logic of how they are individually determined, may seem bewildering, but they clearly indicate the conviction that human conduct affects the order of the universe and must therefore be reflected in personal fortune.

The idiosyncrasies of Incan beliefs and conceptualisations, including those regarding death and afterlife, harmonise with (and perhaps also arise from) the distinctive geography of the areas they inhabited as well as with the socio-political and economical demands of maintaining prosperity in a state (and later in an empire) created in a challenging landscape, where beauty and peril coincide at every step. But as hardships in life so challenges in death were conceived of as routes leading to eternity.

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Section II

Perceiving Death Through Ritual and Burial

Katherine E. Southwood and Karolina Sekita

In this section, we delve into rituals and burials with chapters exploring death in ancient Greece, Etruria, Rome, and Iron Age Jerusalem. Two of the four chapters tackle the challenging topic of infant death, while the other two overlap with them by emphasising the importance of identity and memory.

Dimitrios Bosnakis examines the key metaphors of waste and binding in what he describes as non-normative burial rituals. His essay compares ancient Greek practices with modern Greek folklore, demonstrating imaginative methodology and inviting a heuristic analysis, as discussed in Section I. By ‘non-normative’, Bosnakis refers to burial practices that reveal the ritual reasoning behind handling deaths considered jarringly untimely – such as those of children – or where evidence suggests individuals were buried with fetters. In both cases, these burials are marked as ritually non-normative by the apparent lack of care for the dead, with fetuses, stillborns, neonates, and unclaimed infant corpses being discarded in wells alongside dogs.

The basic premise underlying his argument is that it is natural to exhibit care for the bodies of those who have died, as seen in pot or jar burials for infants and young children. However, as Bosnakis notes, a departure from this norm may suggest social rejection and contempt, potentially driven by a deep-seated fear that underlines these ritual responses. Bosnakis argues that disposing of infants in wells, rather than through more caring forms of ritual and burial, strongly symbolises social waste. Beyond this concept, he also highlights dog sacrifices – suggested by the remains of dogs in the same wells – as apotropaic. Dogs symbolised thresholds, paths, and passageways, so these sacrifices may have been attempts to keep the chthonic separated

from the celestial, or the living from the dead. If this interpretation holds, then seemingly unnatural deaths – such as those of the not yet fully formed, like infants – might have been viewed in ancient Greece as invoking primal fear. In this light, the presence of dogs and the reframing of rejected infants as offerings to the goddess Hecate Chthonia, Enodia, or Artemis-Hecate could offer insights into how death was imagined. Ritual responses that seem extreme, invoking symbols of waste and neglect, might actually have been efforts to ward off chaos. Thus, the ritualistic burial of infants in wells with dogs may have been less about a perceived lack of care and more about anxieties related to maintaining a clear boundary between the living and the dead.

Bosnakis further discusses a group of so-called unnatural deaths (those who passed away suddenly or violently, including suicides, unavenged murder victims, stillborns, and neonates) united by themes of shame and superstition. Underlying these reactions may be a fear of the seemingly arbitrary nature of death, a fear that also permeates the world of the living, which the dead reflect. For example, deaths through suicide or unresolved murder imply a lack of justice in the world of the living, as well as the marginalisation of specific groups, social prejudice, and stigma. In this way, what initially seems distant and *other* in the specific examples from ancient Greece that Bosnakis examines – such as necrophobic tendencies or concerns about liminality and the boundary between the living and the dead – translates into more familiar categories. When we look beyond the morbid, fantasy-like world of superstition and the exoticised ritual practices surrounding death in antiquity, we find something rather mundane and perhaps also recognisable: unrest and a lack of peace among transient living communities. Their fear of death drives them to rationalise (and therefore retain a mirage of agency) why those who died might have deserved their seemingly unnatural end.

Like Bosnakis, Valerie M. Hope also examines infant deaths and mourning for the young in ancient Rome, with a particular focus on the Latin word *acerbus* (bitter, sharp, acrid) and its use in contexts associated with death. Hope discusses the term's broad semantic range in this context, which includes meanings such as 'bitter', 'painful', 'cruel', 'untimely', or 'premature'. The word *acerbus* might therefore serve as an apt term for what Bosnakis designates as 'non-normative' deaths, as there are notable conceptual overlaps. It refers to deaths perceived by the living as untimely (reflected in the metaphor of unripe fruit), unexpected, or particularly tragic. Hope seeks evidence for a distinctive *funus acerbum* but finds the results inconclusive. Rather than risking the potential loss of important distinctions or overlooking crucial details in various types of evidence, she opts for a more cautious approach, emphasising the power of human imagination in a broad sense.

Hope goes on to address the death of children in relation to the term *acerbus*, suggesting that it is more often applied to the untimely deaths of teenagers and young adults than to those of infants. In particular, she makes an important distinction between grief and mourning in the Roman world, arguing that grief is emotional, instinctive, and private, while mourning is public and part of a ritual process that accommodates loss. With this distinction in mind, Hope suggests that if the *funus acerbum* ever existed, it was related to ritual actions and public recognition of death rather than to grief. This distinction is helpful, but it is important to note that grief and mourning are not mutually exclusive or incompatible. Mourning can assist in processing grief, and grief inevitably shapes rituals surrounding mourning. This interrelation is acknowledged in the context of the *funus acerbum*, where Hope recognises that cultural scripts may fluctuate. Importantly, however, *acerbus* emphasises parental loss as a benchmark of suffering and bereavement. In Latin literature, it is particularly connected with the loss of young men in their prime, on the cusp of adulthood.

What makes Hope's essay particularly powerful is the way the image of unripe fruit stands alongside human life. The negation in the term *unripe* expresses what is missing and absent: fruit that never reached its potential. The metaphor's power emerges from the strong imaginative resonance of this image, where unripe fruit and the death of children sit uncomfortably side by side. Imagination is crucial to connecting these two ideas and understanding the metaphor. Part of the reason this metaphor is so impactful is its enduring nature, set against the backdrop of the natural world. After all, it is difficult to conceive of a time or place where the concept of fruit ripening (or not) would be entirely alien.

Valeria Riedemann Lorca shifts the focus from the deceased to the rituals conducted for them. She explores themes and motifs from Greek myths represented in Etruscan funerary art, particularly the altar scenes depicted on sarcophagi. Riedemann examines the iconography of the sarcophagi, questioning whether pictorial altars served as visual substitutes for sacrificial rituals for the dead. She also considers why violent scenes were appealing to the Etruscans in their funerary art and to what extent these representations related to social status, ritual norms, or perhaps both.

Riedemann suggests that Etruscan artists adapted and incorporated Greek iconography on their sarcophagi, creating a blend that made these depictions uniquely Etruscan. It appears that the Etruscan conception of death allowed flexibility that accommodated inconsistencies and seemingly erratic or illogical juxtapositions. Notably, imagination and imaginative engagement – when informed by critical thinking and relevant analytical skills – can open up and draw attention to questions of identity. In this context, it underscores the Etruscan culture with its unique stories, myths, and rituals surrounding death. Certain features of these representations

may suggest a performative aspect of the funerary rituals. For example, the representation of blood may hold ritual significance, positioning the sarcophagi as ‘indexical evidence of the performance of ritual: channels to enter the sphere of the divine and monuments used to determine divine will’ and fulfilling an eschatological role for the dead.

Matthew J. Suriano’s chapter also focuses on monumentality and the significance of tombs, using as a case study an assemblage of Iron Age funerary monuments in Jerusalem’s Silwan Necropolis. Suriano examines the attempts of a select group of elites to transcend the temporal constraints of life through monumentality and the memorialisation. Their tombs are strategically positioned to display power, status, and wealth rather than reflect grief. Ironically, their efforts to overcome death by asserting agency through monumentality only draw more attention to their absence. The complex consists of four above-ground monolithic sepulchres, three of which bear funerary inscriptions. In the Silwan Necropolis, these inscriptions are found on the façades, above the entrance to the respective tomb. This contrasts with other Hebrew funerary inscriptions from this period, which are usually located inside the tomb. Indeed, even the fact that the tombs are above ground marks a departure from the broader burial context, where below-ground bench-tombs, designed to be unobtrusive, were the norm.

Another key feature of the Silwan Necropolis is that the tombs adopt an Egyptian style and influence, contrasting with the more local Judahite style. The inscriptions, architectural style, and above-ground placement of these tombs set them apart from what might typically be expected, raising the question: why? Suriano addresses this by focusing on monumentality, suggesting that tombs in the Silwan Necropolis marked the status of an emerging elite class in Jerusalem during the late monarchy. These elites sought to eschew traditional family-focused Judahite forms of burial. Instead, they aimed to materialise and memorialise their elite ideology through the strategic placement of their tombs and outward-facing inscriptions. In contrast to the non-normative burials discussed in Bosnakis’ chapter, and the epitaphs in Hope’s chapter – where ‘non-normative’ referred to tragic deaths – in Suriano’s chapter, we encounter a different type of departure from the norm. Here, wealth and power sharply contrast with the usual forms of burial, as if the tombs themselves served to concretise the importance of those interred within.

Chapter 5

A Disregard of Decency: Concepts and Metaphors of ‘Waste’ and ‘Binding’ Behind Some Non-Normative Burial Rituals in Ancient Greece and Modern Greek Folklore

Dimitrios Bosnakis

The structure and design of burial customs reflect the socio-cultural settings and boundaries as well as the religious beliefs with which people perceive and deal with death. Compared with the usual typology of funeral rites, the mortuary record in the ancient Greek world includes a grey area of burials ranging between honour and outright dishonour.¹ These are non-normative burial practices² of milder intensity than the refusal of a proper funeral,³ indicating a negative context and volition, and, in some cases, necrophobic attitudes. More specifically, in relation to the mode of interment, there is haste and anonymity. Furthermore, the topography of the burial grounds is marked by the fact that these dead have been buried

¹ Dimitrios Bosnakis, *Dejection and Blame: Degraded and Insulted Dead*, Publication of the Archaeological Bulletin 109 (Athens: The Ministry of Culture and Sport, 2020; 2nd rev. edn, 2023), esp. pp. 241–57. [*Κατηφείη και Όνειδος: Ταπεινωμένοι και Καταφρονεμένοι Νεκροί, Δημοσιεύματα του Αρχαιολογικού Δελτίου 109* (Αθήνα: Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού, 2020, 20232).] Refer to Kostas Vlassopoulos, ‘Review’, *Greece and Rome*, 69.2 (2022), pp. 319–27.

² For a discussion on the terms ‘non-normative’, ‘unusual’, ‘deviant’, etc., see Edeltraud Aspöck, ‘What Actually Is a “Deviant Burial”? Comparing German-Language and Anglophone Research on “Deviant Burials”’, in *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*, ed. by Eileen M. Murphy (Oxford: Oxbow Books; Oakville, CT: David Brown, 2008), pp. 17–34; Bosnakis, *Κατηφείη και Όνειδος*, pp. 72–73 n. 450–52, p. 90 n. 596.

³ Astrid Lindenlauf, ‘Thrown away like Rubbish – Disposal of the Dead in Ancient Greece’, *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, 12 (2001), pp. 86–99. A. Helmis, ‘La privation de sépulture dans l’antiquité grecque’, in *Symposion 2005*, ed. by E. Cantarella (Vienna: Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte, 2007), pp. 259–68.

in unusual or fringe areas within or outside communal cemeteries; this would have resulted in their marginalisation or disappearance from the public gaze and social memory. And finally, regarding the treatment of the corpse, not only is basic care and ornamentation lacking, but also, on the contrary, the leaving of the metal fetters in the pit emphasises a sense of the constant stigmatisation of the dead. Literary sources on exceptions to the funeral form (specific categories of the dead, the description of the type of burials, or the purpose for which they were chosen) are not only noticeably rare, but also require extreme caution in reconstructing and interpreting the meaning or symbolism they may contain. Some typological parallels in modern Greek folklore may be extremely useful, as they preserve a valuable and largely unexplored ‘archaic’ substratum.⁴

(Social) Waste in Wells

The first pattern of non-normative burials concerns the disposal of the corpse in unused wells. ‘Private quiet burials’ (Type IIb), as referred to in my latest study, include non-personae, such as fetuses, stillborn, neonates, and generally unclaimed infants who never joined the family structure. Occasionally, this type of well dumping also involves individuals of an older age group.⁵

In a well on the north side of Agoraios Kolonos, a large amount of bones and coarse ware, including the skeletal remains of about 449 infants, was found. A depositional period of about 15 years (165–150 BCE) was determined through the dating of the pottery retrieved from the so-called Agora Bone Well.⁶ The accumulation of skeletal remains is not the result of a violent event. According to bioarchaeological analysis, the death of about

⁴ For the preservation of ancient Greek religion and funeral rites in Greek folklore, see generally: Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge; New York: Rowman & Littlefoot, 2002); Loring M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); Evy J. Håland, ‘Greek Death-Cult, Modern and Ancient: A Comparison of a Mediterranean and Balcan Cultural Pattern’, *Venets*, 1.2 (2010), pp. 213–55; John Cuthbert Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910).

⁵ Maria A. Liston, Susan I. Rotroff, and Lynn M. Snyder, *The Agora Bone Well*, *Hesperia* Suppl. 50 (Athens: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2018), esp. pp. 26–38; Lisa M. Little and John K. Papadopoulos, ‘A Social Outcast in Early Iron Age Athens’, *Hesperia*, 67.4 (1998), pp. 375–404; John K. Papadopoulos, ‘Skeletons in Wells: Towards an Archaeology of Social Exclusion in the Ancient Greek World’, in *Madness, Disability and Social Exclusion: The Archaeology and Anthropology of ‘Difference’*, ed. by Jane Huber, *One World Archaeology* 40 (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 96–118.

⁶ Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder, *The Agora Bone Well*.

15 per cent of the newborns is attributed to complications during gestation. About one quarter of all newborns have been diagnosed with bacterial meningitis, suggesting that the disease was an underlying threat and main cause of infant mortality in Hellenistic Athens.

During the mortuary use of the well, it is estimated that an average of 30 infants were thrown into it per year. Along with the human skeletons, the bones of more than 150 dogs were also detected in the well. The fluctuations in age do not suggest death by natural causes and the overwhelming proportion of adult dogs rather implies a special ritual. And yet, the bones do not bear any cut marks, which rules out the possibility of a proper sacrifice. Asphyxiation by strangulation or violent torture may have been the cause of their death. During the second quarter of the second century BCE, the wider area around the well was probably a landfill and presented a picture of abandonment. It is likely that the well was no longer a viable source of water when it began to be used as a burial ground for infants. Other debris, mainly pottery, and a large piece of bronze furniture, were later thrown in. The thick layer of a large concentration of stones and soil at 2 m above the bone deposit suggests a rather conscious sealing of the burial site.

A comparable situation of infants and dogs has been found in Messene⁷ in a third–second-century BCE well next to the Agora and close to the old Bouleuterion. There, human skeletal remains were uncovered, commingled with many canine bones and numerous sherds of cooking pots (*chytrai*) and amphorae. The bones, according to the latest study, belonged to 262 premature, newborn, and stillborn babies, confirming the use of the well as a dumping ground for dead infants. A similar burial treatment of infants is found in a well of the first half of the third century BCE to the north of the Sebasteion in Eretria.⁸ It too contained the skeletal remains of infants and dogs, in this case, at least 19 infants and 1,100 canine bones.⁹

⁷ Chryssa Bourbou and Petros Themelis, ‘Child Burials at Ancient Messene’, in *L'enfant et la mort dans l'antiquité I. Nouvelles recherches dans les nécropoles grecques: Le signalement des tombes d'enfants*, ed. by Anne-Marie Guimier-Sorbets and Yvette Morizot (Paris: de Boccard, 2010), pp. 111–28.

⁸ Isabelle Chenal-Velarde, ‘Food, Rituals?’, in *Dogs and People in Social, Working, Economic or Symbolic Interaction*, ed. by Lynn M. Snyder and Elizabeth Moore (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2016), pp. 24–31.

⁹ In another well (K3) near the Gymnasium, whose backfill is after the beginning of the third century CE, bioarchaeological analysis led to the identification of 50 newborns that died in an advanced stage of leprosy. The preliminary report makes no mention of dog bones, however. See Guy Ackermann et al., ‘Le gymnase d’Erétrie’, in *Rapport Annuel 2017*, ed. by Thierry Theurillat (Lausanne: École Suisse d’archéologie en Grèce, 2017), pp. 7–8.

A rough outline of the mortuary record¹⁰ shows that infants who died in their first year of life are either not easily identified or are often underrepresented. Three main trends can be identified for infant burials based on space: (1) a special cemetery only for children under one year of age; (2) a common burial ground that also includes infants in this age category; and (3) a place reserved mainly for infants from 0 to 4 years of age and occasionally for adults.

The scarcity of literary sources with extensive references to childhood mortality does not mean, of course, that there was a lack of parental care for this age group although their precarious position as anonymous and unintegrated members of the community could in many cases explain their underrepresentation. The accounts of the condition of the souls of infants in Hades are not only poor, but even when the question is specifically posed, as in the Platonic Myth of Er (*The Republic* 615c, around 375 BCE), about stillborn and newborns who lived only for a short time, the narrative is interrupted on the grounds that it is not worthy of record.

Although there was no standardised and homogeneous funeral practice, the common tendency for burial and the differentiation of the space according to the age category suggest that a significant number of infants were cared for, even if only in a concise and moderate way of mourning, and that the remains were not left to their fate. From the seventh to fifth centuries BCE, *enchytrismos* (pot or jar burial) for infants and young children defines this age group and infant burials gain visibility. During the Archaic and Classical periods, infant and child cemeteries stretched impressively around the main gates of Athens and along the roads that often led to shrines of deities associated with birth and death. From the fourth century BCE and throughout the Hellenistic period, however, the

¹⁰ Véronique Dasen, 'Archéologie funéraire et histoire de l'enfance dans l'antiquité: Nouveaux enjeux, nouvelles perspectives', in *L'enfant et la mort dans l'antiquité I. Nouvelles recherches dans les nécropoles grecques: Le signalement des tombes d'enfants*, ed. by Anne-Marie Guimier-Sorbets and Yvette Morizot (Paris: de Boccard, 2010), pp. 19–44; Nikolas Dimakis, 'Premature Death and Burial in Classical and Hellenistic Attica', in *Mortuary Variability and Social Diversity in Ancient Greece: Studies on Ancient Greek Death and Burial*, ed. by Nikolas Dimakis and Tamara M. Dijkstra (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020), pp. 102–16; Nikolas Dimakis, 'Burial and Commemoration of Children in Hellenistic Greece', in *Griechische Nekropolen. Neue Forschungen und Funde*, ed. by Heidi Frielinghaus et al., Beiträge zur Archäologie Griechenlands 5 (Möhnesee: Bibliopolis, 2019), pp. 287–305; Sanne Houby-Nielsen, 'Child Burials in Ancient Athens', in *Children and Material Culture*, ed. by Joanna Sofaer Derevenski (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 151–64; Anne Lagia, 'Notions of Childhood in the Classical Polis: Evidence from the Bioarchaeological Record', in *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*, ed. by Ada Cohen and Jeremy B. Rutter, *Hesperia* Suppl. 41 (Athens: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2007), pp. 293–306.

number of infant burials is noticeably low, and, in the context of the general spatial rearrangements, the traditional cemeteries of infants and children are almost removed from the public topography. This may be due to a new system of moral and social values, which has had a dynamic impact on political life, gender relations, and attitudes towards children. The shift in women's values from the duty of childbearing to ideas of luxury, leisure, and body care may have gradually reduced women's own interests in traditional burial customs involving infants.¹¹

But what exactly are the reasons that led to the disposal of infants in wells instead of any other type of burial?¹² Could it be due to unwanted pregnancies and to the low social background and status of mothers?¹³ Could physical disabilities or deformities of infants be considered a factor in rejection or even deliberate infanticide? The low rates for the second category, at least in the well of Athens, would hardly support this hypothesis as a general assertion.¹⁴ Whatever the actual causes were in each case, the choice to throw them in wells seems to be a conscious act and, as a symbolism, the idea of social waste comes closest.

In Athens, the formal acceptance of a newborn baby, at least within its family, took place five to ten days after its birth with the ceremony of the *Amphidromia*.¹⁵ Social identity, however, was acquired at the completion of the first year when a new male member could now register in his father's *phratría* during the autumn festival of the *Apatouria*. Yet, children were not recognised as full members of society until the feast of the *Anthesteria* in their third year, an age most likely associated with the end of the weaning process.¹⁶ In the case of visible, physical impairments, it was left to the

¹¹ Cf. Polybius 36.17, who connects the depopulation of that period to the low birth rate. Darrel W. Amundsen, 'Medicine and the Birth of Defective Children: Approaches of the Ancient World', in *Euthanasia and the Newborn: Conflicts Regarding Saving Lives*, ed. by Richard C. McMillan et al. (Boston, MA: D. Reidel, 1987), p. 8; Richard Harrow Feen, 'Keeping the Balance: Ancient Greek Philosophical Concerns with Population and Environment', *PopulEnviron*, 17.6 (1996), pp. 447–58.

¹² Bosnakis, *Κατηφείη και Όνειδος*, pp. 135–37; Céline Dubois, 'Au fond du puits. Gestion de la mort foetale et périnatale dans le monde grec antique', in *Morts avant de naître: La mort périnatale*, ed. by Catherine Rollet et al., Perspectives historiques: Série médecine (Tours: Presse universitaires François-Rabelais, 2018), pp. 203–19.

¹³ Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder, *The Agora Bone Well*, p. 121.

¹⁴ Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder, *The Agora Bone Well*, pp. 48–51.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, vii.12, 588a; cf. also Plutarch, *Numa* 12.2. Richard Hamilton, *Choes and Anthesteria: Athenian Iconography and Ritual* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Dasen, 'Archéologie funéraire', pp. 297, 303.

¹⁶ Dimakis, 'Premature Death and Burial', p. 290; Mark Golden, 'Childhood in Ancient Greece', in *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece*, ed. by Jenifer Neils and John Howard Oakley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 13–29; Hamilton, *Choes and Anthesteria*.

discretion of the head of the family whether the infant would remain alive and be reared in the family.¹⁷ If his decision was against the survival of the infant, there is evidence that midwives were charged with the task of discarding the child after parturition or in the following days. In cases of perinatal death and fatal disabilities, the issue was not even brought to the family, as they immediately decided on the handling of the body (see Plato's *Theaetetus* 160e–161a, around 369–367 BCE).¹⁸

Dogs in Hellenistic burials of infants inside wells obviously fulfil a special function. Redfield aptly remarked on the metonymic relation in the Homeric epics between dogs and those who are not completely integrated into society.¹⁹ The dog expresses individual disinclination, even aversion, towards the process of civilising and lacks a sense of social shame. As a rule, the dog is ambivalent by nature.²⁰ In an extremely illuminating passage on the subject at hand, Plutarch writes: 'If the sacrifice is a purification, one might say that the dog is sacrificed as being a suitable victim for such rites, since the Greeks, in their rites of purification, carry forth puppies for burial, and in many places make use of the rites called "*periskylakismoi*"' (*Romulus* 21.6, probably at the beginning of the second century CE).²¹

The dog as chthonic offering within a burial context occurs with some frequency in the Bronze Age, seldom in the Early Iron Age, and rather rarely in the Archaic and Classical periods.²² They were recovered in the context of an unusual burial ritual on two occasions. In the first case, within the boundaries of a burial ground of Hellenistic/Early Roman Paphos, a

¹⁷ Amundsen, 'Medicine'; Christian Laes, 'Raising a Disabled Child', in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. by Judith Evans Grubbs et al. (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2013), pp. 125–44.

¹⁸ Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder, *The Agora Bone Well*, pp. 120, 126, 131.

¹⁹ James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1975), p. 194.

²⁰ For dogs in various contexts, see Jacopo Mazzorin and Claudia Minniti, 'Dog Sacrifice in the Ancient World: A Ritual Passage?', in *Dogs and People in Social, Working, Economic or Symbolic Interaction*, ed. by Lynn M. Snyder and Elizabeth A. Moore (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006), pp. 62–66; Jean-Claude Lacam, 'Le sacrifice du chien dans les communautés grecques, étrusques, italiennes et romaines: Approche comparatiste', *MEFRA*, 120 (2008), pp. 29–80; Alessio Sassù, 'Through Impurity: A Few Remarks on the Role of the Dog in Purification Rituals of the Greek World', in *Animals in Greek and Roman Religion and Myth: Proceedings of the Symposium Grumentinum Grumento Nova (Potenza, 5–7 June 2013)*, ed. by Patricia A. Johnston et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 393–418.

²¹ Also Plutarch, *Moralia* 280c. Cf. also the strange behaviour of dogs that enjoy rubbing and rolling on their backs on dead carcasses, which looks like they are trying to absorb or 'wear' their scent (see <<https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/advice/why-does-my-dog-roll-around-where-something-has-died/>>).

²² Leslie Preston Day, 'Dog Burials in the Greek World', *AJA*, 88.1 (1984), pp. 21–32.

newborn infant was discovered alongside parts of a dog, while amputated parts of a canine accompanied another child's cranium. This kind of burial practice is so far without close parallels in the Greek world and the cultural context within which these were performed remains perplexing.²³ The second case concerns an infant cemetery dating to the mid-fifth century CE, which was excavated within a ruined Roman villa (Villa Poggio Gramignano), south of Umbria, near the town of Lugnano in Teverina.²⁴ Archaeological research revealed 47 burials of infants, either stillborn or neonates, buried in amphorae and accompanied by offerings indicative of magical practices, such as decapitated puppies, a raven's talon, a toad, or an upturned vase containing bones. The burials provide evidence of the presence of a disease, which, through DNA analysis, has been identified as malaria. Archaeologists found 13 puppies, all of which were estimated to be between 5 to 6 months old. Most of them bear cut-marks and indications of the cutting of their mandibles as part of a ritual practice. Panic due to the disease may have prevailed in the area and caused a revival of the practice of sorcery.

A closer look at the relevant literary and archaeological evidence shows that dog sacrifices in the Greek world were associated with ambiguous and apotropaic divinities in keeping with the protective nature of the animal, which guarded thresholds and entrances, paths, and passageways. When bisected and divided, 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, and the living from the dead. According to the prevalent religious beliefs, the disposal of babies in wells could cause *miasma* and pollution, and all those involved are obliged to act accordingly.²⁵ The gathering of numerous souls of prematurely dead infants at the centre of cities would naturally induce many to fear sudden attacks by shadowy ghosts. Thus, the presence of dogs together with rejected infants in the wells of Hellenistic *poleis* may be understood as offerings, which were offered to the goddess Hecate Chthonia, Enodia, or Artemis-Hecate, as a response to

²³ Eustathios Raptou, 'Nouvelles pratiques funéraires à Paphos hellénistique et romaine', *CCEC*, 39 (2009), pp. 97, 104–05. Cf. also the necropolis with infants and dogs in Qasr 'Allam, Bahariya: Frédéric Adam and Frédéric Colin, 'Inhumations d'enfants et de chiens à Qasr 'Allam, Bahariya, Égypte', in *L'enfant et la mort dans l'antiquité II*, ed. by Marie-Dominique Nenna (Alexandria: Centre d'études Alexandrines, 2012), pp. 315–29.

²⁴ Lacam, 'Le sacrifice du chien', pp. 37–38; David Soren, 'Can Archaeologists Excavate Evidence of Malaria?', *World Archaeology*, 35.2 (2003), pp. 193–209.

²⁵ Cf. *Inscriptions of Greek Cyrenaica* 167, B 106–09. SEG 9.72, a *lex sacra* from Cyrene at the end of the fourth century BCE, differentiates the *miasma* from miscarriages according to the appearance of the fetus: if the child is recognisable, people are polluted as if by death, but if it is not, the house is polluted as if by childbirth.

an alarming concern for the *miasma*. The ritual may ensure the protection of the living from the pollution of the untimely deceased; it preserves the boundary between life and death by facilitating their passage to the Underworld and preventing their return to life. Dog offerings could perhaps also be seen as a high-intensity ritual for special occasions requiring special actions.²⁶ It is therefore not surprising that, as in other related cases, no specific deity is named as the recipient.

Given that differentiation in burial practices for infants was common in the Greek world, a question arises whether their disposal was associated not only with age grades or degrees of social incorporation but also with the fact that they were socially unwanted. There is obviously no way to know their social origin with certainty (illegitimate, children of prostitutes or slaves) and the exact causes of death in all cases (abortions, infanticide, perinatal deaths from natural causes), but the choice to dispose of them in wells, even if it symbolically constitutes a burial and facilitates the passage of souls to the jurisdiction of the chthonic gods, creates negative associations. One passage in Plato's *Republic* should not escape our attention. In *The Republic* 460c, we read that disabled children, who are useless either to the state or to themselves, must be hidden—as is the right thing to do—in a secret and unseen place. The use of the verb 'to hide', although ambiguous,²⁷ may have the meaning of 'to bury'. In *The Iliad* 18.396, for instance, it is clear that Hera intends to kill rather than hide the deformed newborn Hephaestus. One may reasonably ask whether such a perception arose from Plato's social experience with the discarding of infants in wells or indeed even in earlier times than the period of the disposals we are examining. The wells, as

²⁶ At this point, a special reference should be made to the quite popular and repulsive *gaudium* of dog torture (*kynomartyrion*), sometimes up to its death, ethnologically attested in the Balkan region and Greece up to the modern times (at least until 1987!). Two tall stakes are driven into the ground and connected by two ropes. They twist the ropes with a stick in the middle until they become a braid and the head of the dog is passed through the loop formed at the end. By pulling the twisted ropes from the bottom, they are untangled with speed and hurl the dog into the air, which, barking terribly and convulsing, often dies. In some areas, various objects are hung on their tails. The animals are then sometimes hunted, sometimes stoned, or generally beaten to death. The symbolism and ritual logic of the custom, which usually took place on Clean Monday (Christian day of abstinence from meat and dairy products) remain difficult to interpret and controversial. The excuse given by the perpetrators of the ritual, that the animals are being punished and tortured to get diseases out of them ('so they do not get rabies in the summer'), may reach back to their original ritual purpose, which was to be a deterrent and cathartic ritual. See Manolis G. Sergis, 'Dog Sacrifice in Ancient and Modern Greece: From the Sacrifice Ritual to Dog Torture (*kynomartyrion*)', *Folklore*, 45 (2010), pp. 61–88.

²⁷ Amundsen, 'Medicine', p. 11; John J. Mulhern, 'Population and Plato's *Republic*', *Arethusa*, 8 (Fall 1975), pp. 274–80.

waste sites, symbolically suggest not only the absence of rudimentary family care but also a kind of religious disorder.

If we carefully study Plutarch's (*Moralia* 608a–612b. *Moralia* predates the *Parallel Lives*) account of the reasons the ancestral customs and ancient laws do not allow libations to children who died in infancy as well as any of the other ceremonies customary for the dead, popular perceptions on the subject may include other deeper superstitions. Children have no connection with the earth or earthly things, nor do they remain where the burial takes place, such as by the side of the graves, because it is believed that they depart for a better and more divine region. But as a mode of burial, does dumping in wells fulfil the basic requirements for the departure of souls to a happier place? And if not, could this generate popular fears that these infants would remain around the place of the deposition of their bodies, becoming sad, homeless beings, unprotected by burials, wandering restlessly and menacingly between the two worlds?²⁸ Coexistence in the well with older individuals and abused children further confirms their particularly degrading condition and consequently the exclusion of infants from the usual burial rites makes purification an urgent necessity for the living.

The comparison of the archaeological record of the Greek world with Arnold van Gennep's²⁹ anthropological data is particularly illuminating in two respects: firstly, the body of the child that has not been given a name (or has not been circumcised etc.) is buried without rituals or is discarded as waste (or is burnt, especially in cultures which believe that the child does not have a soul yet) and, secondly, those who have not gone through rituals, such as baptism, initiation, or naming, are condemned to a pitiable condition and, as they cannot join the society of the dead just as they cannot rejoin the society of the living, become dangerous and malevolent dead. Arnold van Gennep also attests that, for Catholic societies, the children who passed away unbaptised and had not been integrated into the society of the living, remained in a transitional state (*limbus infantium*). The widespread superstition that murdered children, the unbaptised, or those who have not been interred in a consecrated place could turn into *revenants*, is likewise corroborated by the Scandinavian world.³⁰

In order to gain a proper understanding of the dumping of infants in the wells, it will be helpful to delve into the different funeral practices described in modern Greek folklore for unbaptised neonates, stillborn, fetuses (either

²⁸ Bosnakis, *Κατηφείη και Ονειδος*, p. 123. Cf. Dasen, 'Archéologie funéraire', pp. 25–30.

²⁹ Arnold van Gennep et al., *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 52 n. 5, 93, 133, 152–53, 160.

³⁰ Juha Pentikäinen, 'The Dead without Status', *Temenos*, 4 (1969), pp. 99–100.

from miscarriage or abortion), and generally unwanted infants (from illicit sexual encounters) who were usually smothered by their mothers for fear of their transgression being discovered.³¹ Their disposal, literally as social discards, has nearly always been associated with isolated creeks, ravines, and wastelands. For legitimate newborns that died unbaptised, however, an equally degrading ritual is prescribed: they were sometimes inhumed face-down either outside the precinct of a church or close to remote chapels. In Nikolaos Politis' seminal work 'Traditions of the Greek People'³² and in the records of the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, a multitude of terms are used to describe such discarded infants. They are often likened to *telonia*³³ and visualised as demonic creatures of undeterminable form or exhibiting abnormal and unnatural characteristics, sometimes appearing in the form of a dog, as shrieking hairy children, or as small devils with black wings.

It is the special category of spirits, the *telonia*, that deserves special attention. This kind of aerial genie (*telonia* literally means customhouses or custom officers) represents a strange fruit of popular Christian theology with a certain substrate of ancient Greek superstition.³⁴ However, the idea of evil *telonia* is also attested in texts of some early Christian authors.³⁵ Until the soul was presented to God, it had to endure on its post-death journey the careful inspection of these unfortunate and resentful custom officers guarding the way and searching the soul of the deceased for any sin. But how were these custom officers formed? According to Greek folklore (mainly in Crete), young unbaptised children and illegitimate children or fetuses from miscarriages became *telonia* when they died.

In order not to be transformed to aerial custom officers, they had to be buried outside the common cemeteries and weighed down with heavy

³¹ Despina M. Damianou, *Λαϊκές αφηγήσεις. Μύθοι και παραμύθια των Κυθήρων. Φανταστική δημιουργία και πραγματικότητα* (Αθήνα: Εταιρεία Κυθηραϊκών Μελετών, 2005), pp. 85–87, 169–81 [*Folk Tales. Fables and Fairytales of Kythera: Imaginative Creation and Reality* (Athens: Society of Kytheraic Studies, 2005)]; Kanakes I. Geronymakis, *Κρητική Λαογραφία* (Ηράκλειο, Κρήτης: Εκδόσεις Μύστης, 2008), pp. 270–71, 274 [*Cretan Folklore* (Heraclion, Crete: Mystis Editions, 2008)]; Bosnakis, *Κατηφείη και Όνειδος*, pp. 86–87.

³² Nikolaos G. Politis, *Παραδόσεις, Μελέται περί του βίου και της γλώσσης του ελληνικού λαού* (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Ιστορική Έρευνα, 1904), pp. 314–30, 606–09. [*Traditions: A Study of the Life and Language of the Greek People* (Athens: Historical Research Institute, 1904.)]

³³ <<http://repository.kentrolaografias.gr/xmlui/discover?scope=%2F&query=%CF%84%CE%B5%CE%BB%CF%8E%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%B1&submit>> [accessed 11 May 2022].

³⁴ Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, pp. 284–87.

³⁵ Charles du Fresne du Cange, *Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Graecitatis III* (Lyon: Anissonii, 1688), pp. 1541–42, s.v. Τελώνια.

stones so that they could not get out.³⁶ These infants, without a name or identity, akin to social refuse, and scorned even after death, are always tied topographically to the site of their disposal, eternally bearing the Original Sin, which baptism would have washed away. During the night, passers-by would hear them snivelling, shrieking, blaspheming, and at times, even spurting flames. It was a commonly held view that they directed their rage and fury towards the living, cursing the priests who left them unbaptised, assaulting and hurling stones at the unsuspecting passers-by, butchering cattle, and decimating entire herds and flocks. However, the most prominent victim of their vengeance was their own mother, whom they relentlessly sought, screeching 'Bitch mother, give me my name!' (This jarring outcry is known especially from Kythera.) Or, in Crete, it is attested that they could hear the *telonia* crying and weeping and their crying was translated as follows: 'Damn the mother and the midwife and all those who were near and did not give me a soul.' They also mentioned the midwife because many died in childbirth. The mother who had the misfortune of having a miscarriage was a sinner.

Politis asserts that these demonic beings are a result of the interchange between elements of pastoral superstitious beliefs about the transformation of illegitimate male children after their premature death into harmful demons, the beliefs about the return of the dead as vampires with malevolent intentions because of their untimely, sudden, or violent deaths, and the ecclesiastical superstitions about children who were conceived by or born to immoral parents during one of the major Church festivals. The discarded children from illegitimate intercourses, which in some folklore accounts could reappear after being disposed of as dogs, were also called puppies in some areas (e.g. Sfakia, Crete). This demeaning characterisation accurately reflects the community's contempt towards extramarital childbearing and befits the cruel treatment that these infants received as socially insignificant and suitable for rejection.

The 'quiet burials' and the ritual of offering canines in Hellenistic wells, based on the anthropological and folkloric data that may fill in the gaps in the ancient texts, present a burial ritual that indicates the negative and, at the same time, superstitious disposition of the public opinion both towards illegal and shameless procreation and towards the malicious intentions of those infants who have not even received a name and who have never acquired their social identity. They came into the world through shameless actions, like the mating of dogs. They remained like puppies in the very short time that they lived: unconfined, roaming somewhere betwixt and between civilisation and savagery, and wandering contemptuously after death between the world of the dead and of the living. What accompanying

³⁶ Cf. *supra* p. 97.

offering could best be associated with these unclaimed infants in their perpetual liminal state—an offering that would be effective in deterring them from attacking the living, in purifying the living (parents, midwives, community), in attending to them, and protecting them—if not those animals that metaphorically and metonymically remind the living of them?

(Loosing and) Binding the Dead

The second pattern of burial, the ‘Shameful (mass or individual) burials’ (Type IIIb), involves the bound dead.³⁷ In these burial practices, the deceased are stigmatised by the metal fetters that remained on their bodies, which would have symbolised the restraints on their movements. Thus far, the use of bonds or fetters in a funerary context has been identified in individual or group burials in at least 19 sites, 10 in Greece (Pydna, Akanthos, Pht. Thebes, Pharsalos, Kamariza, Kaiadas, Heraklion, Chania, Phaleron, and Delos), 6 in Italy (Pithecosa, Selinous, Akragas, Himera, Camarina, Piombino), and 1 each in France (Martigues), Albania (Selca e Poshtëme), and the Black Sea (Apollonia Pontica).

The hasty ‘demeaning public burials’ (Type IV),³⁸ intended only for convicts executed by public authorities, will not be discussed in this paper, despite the particular interest of the cases of Phaleron³⁹ and Rhodes.⁴⁰ Furthermore, due to the limited length of this contribution, I will refer only to two indicative cases of fettered dead from Greece. A mass burial, dated to the second half of the fourth century BCE, was discovered in the northern cemetery of ancient Pydna.⁴¹ Within a rectangular rock-cut

³⁷ See the lists in Bosnakis, *Κατηγοίη και Ονειδος*, pp. 140–58, and Pier Giovanni Guzzo, ‘Ceppi in ferro da sepolture e da santuari (VIII-I sec. a.C.). Problemi di interpretazione’, *Aristonothos*, 16 (2020), pp. 127–79.

³⁸ Bosnakis, *Κατηγοίη και Ονειδος*, pp. 159–72.

³⁹ Constantinos Balamoshev, ‘Αποτομπανισμός: Just Death by Exposing on the Plank?’, *JJP*, 41 (2011), pp. 15–33; Jean-Christophe Couvenhes, ‘L’exposition d’un condamné afin que mort s’ensuive: *apotympanismos* et *anastausis* dans le domaine militaire grec attique’, in *Corps au supplice et violence de guerre dans l’Antiquité*, ed. by Annie Allély (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2014), pp. 27–39; Louis Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 240–48; Guzzo, ‘Ceppi in ferro’, pp. 133–35 n. 2; Anne Ingvarsson and Ylva Bäckström, ‘Bioarchaeological Field Analysis of Human Remains from the Mass Graves at Phaleron, Greece’, *Opuscula*, 12 (2019), pp. 7–153.

⁴⁰ See the mass grave in Rhodes in the first century CE with approximately 29 crucified dead and a deposit of 38 curse tablets: Maria Michalaki-Kollia, ‘Οδός Σαλάκου, έργα Δήμου’ [‘Salakou Street, Municipality Works’], *ADelt*, 42 (1987), p. 601. For crucifixion, see John Granger Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World*, WUNT 327 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

⁴¹ Guzzo, ‘Ceppi in ferro’, esp. pp. 14, 157–60; Sevi Triantaphyllou and M. Bessios, ‘A

shaft, approximately 115 individuals were found hastily deposited. The excavators identified four successive depositional levels of varying numbers of individuals: 57 in the earliest level, 2 in the intermediate, 45 in the succeeding, and 11 in the latest and final level.

Excavators also found various items in the shaft; these may be interpreted as the personal belongings of the deceased although, in most cases, they could be considered as grave gifts. Iron shackles have been found on four skeletons: a neck band (level A), a hand and leg cuff (level B), and pair of iron fetters for the legs (level D). Macroscopic osteological analysis of 58 out of 115 skeletons from the upper levels revealed a nearly equal number of males and females of all ages. There is no evidence for a violent cause of death. Instead, there are signs of severe malnutrition and musculoskeletal deformation presumably because of repetitive heavy labour. Difficult living conditions combined with continuous labour and inadequate diet contributed, perhaps with the addition of a contagious disease, which is undetectable in the osseous record, to the deaths of adolescents and young adults alike. The identity of these wretched dead should be sought, according to the excavators, in slaves and captives within the context of the slave trade in Macedonia during the second half of the fourth century BCE.⁴²

Another example is that of the Akanthos cemetery. Twelve dead (out of a total of 11,098 graves) were discovered with fetters on their ankles. These were dispersed throughout the north-western area of the cemetery and most of them were interred in individual, shallow pit graves without any offerings.⁴³ In the absence of a study of the skeletal material, their age, sex, and the circumstances resulting in their deaths remain unspecified. The purpose of this kind of interment is not clear, although the burial ritual indicates offensive behaviour rather than slavery.

Fetters in antiquity, as literary sources attest, had a variety of uses: they could be placed on prisoners of war (Kaiadas, Himera?),⁴⁴ on incarcerated

Mass Burial at Fourth Century BCE Pydna, Macedonia, Greece: Evidence for Slavery?, *Antiquity*, 79.305 (2005), <http://www.antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/triantaphyllou_305/>.

⁴² See the scenes on the gravestone of Aulus Capriilius, a freedman and slave trader, from first century BCE or CE Amphipolis, with a procession of chained slaves: Hervé Duchêne, 'Sur la stèle d'Aulus Capriilius Timotheos, sômatemporos', *BCH*, 110.1 (1986), pp. 522–25; Jerzy Kolendo, 'Les esclaves dans l'art antique: La stèle funéraire d'un marchand d'esclaves Thraces découverte à Amphipolis', *Archeologia*, 29 (1978), pp. 26–32.

⁴³ Eleni Trakosopoulou, 'The Cemetery at Akanthos: The "Fettered Dead"', in *Esclavage antique et discriminations socio-culturelles: Actes du XXVIII^e colloque international du groupement international de recherche sur l'esclavage antique (Mytilène, 5–7 Décembre 2003)*, ed. by V. I. Anastasiadis and Panagiotes N. Doukellis (Berne; New York: Lang, 2005), pp. 157–65; Guzzo, 'Ceppi in ferro', pp. 154–57 n. 13.

⁴⁴ Pierre Ducrey, *Le traitement des prisonniers de guerre dans la Grèce antique des origins*

convicts,⁴⁵ or on common criminals (thieves, public debtors, etc.).⁴⁶ According to Demosthenes (24.114), such imposed restraints functioned as a means of stigmatisation, since the one shackled bore disdain, contempt, shame, and disgrace for the rest of his days. Fetters on the ankles of prisoners (Heraklion, Chania?) or slaves (Piombino, Akragas, Camarina, Pht. Thebes, Pharsalos, Martigues, Albania, Apollonia Pontica?), either as punishment, or to deter them from a potential attempt at escape, permitted working in free space to an extent, but the weighty bonds would severely restrict any movements and enhance fatigue. For convicts, the sheer heaviness of the burden alone would induce a slow and agonising death from exhaustion, especially in the context of hard labour in quarries or mines (Kamariza). Even the social status of the fettered dead remains uncertain (slaves or citizens); the ‘punitive’ fetters left on the corpses undeniably suggest—this is albeit invisible in the pit—eternal slavery (interpreted literally or symbolically). Whatever the explanation for each circumstance, even epilepsy has been suggested in some cases (Selinous, Akanthos), yet an air of superstition hangs over certain burials and the excuse of disregard for removing the shackles from the bodies of the dead is not convincing. As necrophobic insecurities may also be hidden behind the burial ritual, I would like to put more emphasis on this very aspect in this paper.

For the Christian world, in many local traditions, bodily dissolution was a crucial issue that concerned the safety of the community of the living and the interests of the deceased. But also in other cultures, for example, in Indonesia (Borneo), there was the widespread belief that, while the decay process lasted and the body remained tied to the society of the living, the soul hovered about impure with a spiteful disposition on the edge of the visible world. The awkward wandering and its successful transfer to the world of the dead ended only with the complete decomposition of the corpse.⁴⁷ The concepts of soul and body in ancient and modern Greece,⁴⁸ as

à la conquête romaine (Paris: de Boccard, 1999), p. 219; F. Henry Thompson, ‘Fetters on the Wall’, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 74 (1994), pp. 12–15.

⁴⁵ Danielle S. Allen, ‘Imprisonment in Classical Athens’, *CQ*, 47.1 (1997), pp. 121–35; Virginia Hunter, ‘Policing Public Debtors in Classical Athens’, *Phoenix*, 54.1/2 (2000), pp. 21–38.

⁴⁶ Nikolaos Giannakopoulos, ‘Violating the Security of the *Oikia*: Thefts from Houses in the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial Periods’, in *Violence and Community: Law, Space and Identity in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean World*, ed. by I. Xydopoulos et al. (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 175–84; Hunter, ‘Policing Public Debtors’, 2000. Also Demosthenes, 22.68.

⁴⁷ Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand* (Aberdeen: Cohen & West, 1960), pp. 33–37, 43–61, 72–86.

⁴⁸ Bosnakis, *Κατηφείη και Όνειδος*, pp. 82–86.

well as the issue of the *vrykólakas* (plural *vrykólakes*)⁴⁹/vampire (the vengeful dead who in ancient Greece were known by various names, such as *alastores*, *prostropaioi*, *palamnaioi*, and *miastores*),⁵⁰ have from early on attracted the interest of the brilliant scholar John Cuthbert Lawson, both in terms of the features and of the origin of the superstition as well as the later influences from the Orthodox Church and Slavonic lore.⁵¹

When we contrast the categories of the dead who met all the requirements to become *vrykólakes*/vampires (the transformation is definitely linked to the unsuccessful decomposition of the body) – as these derive from Barber’s ‘universal’ pattern (predisposition, predestination, things that happened and things that did not happen in the lifetime of the deceased) – with the later Greek folkloric model, a substrate of genuine ancient superstition is ascertained: those who were denied a proper burial ritual, those who passed away suddenly or violently (Greek element), including suicides, victims whose murder was not avenged, stillborn and neonates (Greek element – premature/ecclesiastical element – unbaptised), those who died following a curse (Greek element), people with bad behaviour and immoral conduct, and generally those who engaged in witchcraft (Greek and ecclesiastical elements) are the prime suspects likely to return to the world of the living. Recording the modern Greek superstitions about revenants due to the non-decay of the remains and the use of the term *vrykólakas*, Lawson came to the following conclusions: (1) the whole concept of *vrykólakas*, though foreign, is also partly Greek,⁵² and (2) the Greeks borrowed the word *vrykólakas* from the Slavs, which meant ‘werewolf’, but later used it for ‘vampire’. Before then, the Greeks used the words *tympaniaios* and *katakhanas* for anything related to vampires, which means that some superstitions about the resuscitation of corpses existed among the Greeks before the Slavs. One of the interesting elements observed in the mentioned groups is the widespread belief in ancient and modern Greece that both the victim and the murderer were predisposed to becoming revenants; the perpetrator because of the *miasma* and the impending curse of the crime and the victim as a dead person whose life was violently disrupted. The philologically attested *maschalismos* that signified the ritual mutilation of

⁴⁹ <<http://repository.kentrolaografias.gr/xmlui/discover?scope=%2F&query=%CE%B2%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%B5%CF%82&submit=>>>.

⁵⁰ Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 47–49, 55, 80–84, 142–43. Cf. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, pp. 462–84.

⁵¹ Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, pp. 364–412.

⁵² Some equivalent Greek terms for revenants descriptive of their swollen or repulsive appearance are: *tympaniaios* = drumlike, *alytos* = not-loosed/incorrupt, *sarkomenos* = fleshy, *anakathoumenos* = who sits up in the grave, and *katakhanas* = gaper or destroyer.

the body was intended to weaken the corpse's strength and immobilise it, thereby rendering its intense desire for revenge impotent.⁵³

As the corpse that does not decay is the main reason for the transformation of a dead person into a *vrykólakas* (*Nomocanon* of the Orthodox Church), excommunication was (and still is) an effective weapon of intimidation and social control and much more so if the pronouncement involves the formula of a curse. The very wording of the performance visualises accurately this primal fear: 'And after death thou shalt be bound (=incorrupt) eternally, even as stones and iron' (καὶ ἔση μετὰ θάνατον ἄλυτος αἰώνιος, ὡς αἱ πέτραι καὶ τὰ σίδηρα) or, in a briefer version, 'And after death bound and indissoluble' (καὶ μετὰ τὸν θάνατον ἄλυτος καὶ ἀπαράλυτος); namely, chained after death and not dissolved.⁵⁴ The punishment imposed by excommunication is that the condemned person will be in the permanent possession of the devil. Nevertheless, the original concept of 'binding and loosing' is directly derived from Christ's own teaching: 'Whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven' (Matt. 16:19), and the same guarantee is repeated in Matthew 18:18 in reference to all of Jesus' disciples. As is evident from the above, in the tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church, the verbs in ancient and modern Greek, λύω/λύωνω (release, dissolve) and δέω/δένω (to hold in bonds), acquire a specific meaning, visualising equally the concepts of dissolution and absolution. The good and virtuous deceased are 'loosed bodies' (λελυμένα), released from their sentence/punishment, or forgiven for their sins, and therefore, dissolved after death, whereas the wicked or excommunicated are 'bound/not loosed bodies' (ἄλυτα) and are not dissolved after death.

But is the idea of 'loosing and binding' in the context of death a later Christian invention? In Plato's *Phaedo* (around 360 BCE), death is described as the release of the soul from the body.⁵⁵ Philosophy, as a rehearsal for death, sets the deliverance of the soul from the bondage of the body—from the fetters of physical existence—as its main goal (see *Phaedo* 67c). Only the souls of the virtuous who rightly pursued and really practised philosophy could depart pure for the Other World (81a), whereas those who were closely bound to bodily desires and pleasures were left defiled and impure

⁵³ Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers* 434–43; Sophocles, *Electra* 444–46. Johnston, *Restless Dead*, pp. 156–58, and Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, pp. 435, 442; Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 109–10.

⁵⁴ Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, especially pp. 388, 397–98, 401.

⁵⁵ David Ebrey, 'The Asceticism of the *Phaedo*: Pleasure, Purification, and the Soul's Proper Activity', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 99.1 (2017), pp. 1–3; Conrado Eggers Lan, 'Body and Soul in Plato's Anthropology', *Kernos*, 8 (1995), pp. 107–12.

(81b–c) and could not pass quietly into the world of the dead. The latter are dragged back into the visible world in the form of shadowy apparitions, haunting the surrounding areas of their tombs and sepulchres,⁵⁶ unable to free themselves in purity. The souls of the wicked are forced to wander in such places as a punishment for their former evil way of life until they are again imprisoned in a new body (81e–82e). In this way, the prisoner himself becomes an accomplice to his imprisonment, as every ‘pleasure or pain nails the soul as with a nail to the body and rivets it on and makes it corporeal’, and never has any participation in communion with the divine, pure, and absolute (83e). In the final trial of the judges in the underworld, ‘those who are found to have excelled in holy living are freed from these regions within the earth and are released as from prisons’ (114b).

Nonetheless, ancient popular religion, as some literary references indicate, probably did not regard death as the definitive severance of the soul from the body because there was still the belief that the soul could even return and re-animate the body under certain circumstances.⁵⁷ Moreover, a sudden or violent death, perhaps because the soul had no time to prepare itself for death, or because the time was not ripe to leave this world, or even worse, a family curse with its binding power,⁵⁸ or a mortal sin, such as murder, could leave the corpse intact and incorruptible. Only the decomposition of the body could put an end to this hopeless and frightening condition, in which the dead person belonged neither to one world nor to the other. Disintegration is achieved either by interment or by cremation, but the only sure way to guarantee immediate dissolution is cremation. Although it is plausible that ancient beliefs could have been altered over the ages by the infusion of alien doctrines, some records of superstition seem to have survived, as in the case of curses or the fear of the possibility that the body might not decompose. Since the ancient curses are largely identified with the later Christian ones,⁵⁹ it is not unreasonable to suppose

⁵⁶ Cf. Lucian, *The Liar* 29, that the only souls that wander the earth are those of people who met a violent death, such as those who were hanged, beheaded, or impaled.

⁵⁷ The corporeal revenants of the popular creed, except for the two clear cases in the literary sources of imperial times (Phlegon, *Mirabilia* 1; Lucian, *The Liar* 26), are also implied in three other instances in classical literature: Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers* 489–90, and Sophocles, *Electra* 453–54. Also cf. Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 1072–73. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, pp. 438–39.

⁵⁸ Cf. Christopher A. Faraone, ‘Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of “Voodoo Dolls” in Ancient Greece’, *CA*, 10.2 (1991), pp. 165–205, and John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), for the binding power of curse tablets and magic dolls, respectively.

⁵⁹ Two imprecations uttered by heroes in Euripides’ tragedies have as a central motif that, if things are not as they are presented, then may the earth not receive them, or cast

that the superstition which had fuelled them must also be identified with the modern one on which they are based. The literary accounts, with the natural automatic manner that always characterises the utterance of a curse among all peoples, confirm to a great extent that the belief in the non-dissolution or rejection of the body by the earth and the forces below the earth was as powerful a terror in antiquity as it was later.⁶⁰

But then how can we explain the insistence of the literary tradition, from Homer to Lucian, that only mentions the reappearance of the soul and never of the body? I propose that Lawson's argument that popular belief in antiquity must be the same as the later Christian one and that literary propriety simply forbade more than a mere verbal reference to such gross superstitions as bodily resuscitation, is compelling. When literature required a dead hero to re-appear, he was conventionally depicted as a ghost, not as a walking corpse, and this was apparently a necessary convention for the stage rules of the theatre. In the light of these observations, Plato's account of the wandering souls of base men among the graves might be closer to popular creeds. Of course, Plato would never have accepted the idea that the body would remain incorruptible under certain circumstances and he therefore kept what he could and changed only what he had to.

After all this juxtaposition of evidence of superstition in the ancient world and in Greek folklore, are we finally able to interpret the fettered dead? If we include in the ancient sources another piece of information coming from the scholiast of Homer's *Odyssey* (11.48),⁶¹ that the dead and demons fear iron (this was a widespread belief), then, for several cases of the bound dead (when it was not literally a mark of slavery), we may assume necrophobic superstition in the application of the practice. Certain dead, whose manner of death or behaviour in life might have been cause for concern of becoming revenants, should remain permanently restricted in their movements either as a deterrent to protect the living from their possible attacks or as a punishment so that they may eventually join the other world peacefully.

them out: Euripides, *Orestes* 1086, and *Hippolytus* 1038. Cf. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1383 ff., and Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers* 287–88. See also Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, pp. 419–20, for his comments on the meaning of the word ἀπουκίζω, 'Tartarus should not receive him, but reject him from the home of the dead', and pp. 421–23, for the translation of the verse 'κακῶς ταρχευσθέντα παμφθάρτω μόρω', with the phrase 'preserved from corruption'. The latter reference is very close to the meaning-content of the excommunication formula 'and after death thou shalt be indissoluble'.

⁶⁰ The 'bound' condition of the damned to incorruption may also be discerned in two other passages of Aeschylus (*The Suppliants* 407 ff. and *The Eumenides* 173 ff.). Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, p. 424.

⁶¹ Cf. Quintilian, *The Major Declamations* 10.2, 6–8, 16, and 18 (*sepulcrum incantatum*). For the management of ghosts, see also Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, pp. 179–80.

To sum up, social prejudices and negative attitudes towards certain social groups, either because of their liminal or marginal status, or even reprehensible conduct, had a significant impact on the way they were buried, forming in the ancient world a grey area of non-normative burial patterns. These practices can hardly be interpreted outside the historical-religious and socio-political context of the ancient world. Nevertheless, between the ancient and Christian worlds, compatible burial habits and objectives can be identified, which seem to reflect relevant socio-cultural contexts and boundaries. Moreover, it cannot be denied that it is the same undercurrent that runs through the ancient world, carrying along its course popular religious beliefs, philosophical ideas, and social practices. When it reaches the Christian world, it modifies, or alters, the meaning of ancient motifs into new concepts or metaphors, while focusing strongly on the moral dimension of transgressions. Between the basic layers of the vertical stratigraphy of perceptions and attitudes of the two worlds, Plato's ideas act as an intermediate adhesive. We could also argue that all of these deviant practices above provide heuristic examples of imaginative engagement with elements from ancient literary sources.

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Chapter 6

The Bitter Taste of Death: Mourning for the Young in Ancient Rome

Valerie M. Hope

Just as fruits when they are green are with difficulty plucked from the tree, but when ripe and mellow fall of themselves, so, with the young, death comes as a result of force, while with the old it is the result of ripeness.

Cicero *De Senectute* 71¹

The metaphor that compared the human body (or life) to the fruit of a tree was an established one in both Latin literature and epitaphs.² The comparison served to negotiate, and offer consolation for, the pain and shock associated with the premature deaths of the young, since it was only natural, and thus to be accepted, that some fruits would never reach maturity. In recent decades, how these immature fruits of ancient Rome were thought of, imagined, and treated has been much discussed, if in a somewhat polarised fashion. It has been argued that either the death of children was rationalised to the point of indifference or was a source of great regret and sorrow.

An aspect of these debates is the Latin word *acerbus* (bitter, sharp, acrid) and its use in death contexts. On the one hand, the linking of *acerbus* with death (*mors acerba*), which utilised the comparison between youth and unripe fruit (including the sour taste of the latter), represented the deeply bitter and painful experience of early death. On the other hand, the linking of *acerbus* with the funeral (*funus acerbum*) may suggest that those who died prematurely were buried in a perfunctory fashion. Here I will explore uses of *acerbus*, mainly in Rome and Italy during the late Republic and first two centuries CE, and consider what constituted a ‘bitter death’ and

¹ Translation: Cicero, *On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination*, trans. by W. A. Falconer, Loeb Classical Library 154 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923).

² e.g. Ps. Sen. *Rem. Fort.* 13.1–3. Cf. Hom. *Il.* 6.144–49. For epitaphs, see below.

whether there was a distinctive ‘bitter funeral’. In doing so, the need to distinguish between the emotion of grief and the rituals of mourning will be highlighted.

Bitter Death – Literature

The original meaning of *acerbus* was a bitter or sour taste, especially of immature fruit, yet in literature, especially Latin poetry, *acerbus* was rarely employed in this literal sense. Instead, *acerbus* was most often used metaphorically to express cruelty, suffering, harshness, or enmity, with the physical sensory experience of tasting sharp food being equated primarily to emotional responses.³ When linked with death, *acerbus* held several interwoven meanings which could be applied to the dead (or their death) and/or bereaved persons:

- the dead person was like an unripe fruit harvested too soon, and thus the death was premature and/or unexpected;
- death was bitter for the dead person (or their spirit) due to the loss of the opportunities of life, the dashing of hopes and prospects;
- the process of dying may have been physically and emotionally distressing and/or painful;
- the death brought bitterness and suffering to the bereaved who, separated too soon from their loved-one, endured the biting pain of loss.

These significances of *acerbus* were often inseparable since an early death was viewed as particularly unkind both for the dead and those that survived them, but in translation it can be difficult to judge whether to best render the term as ‘bitter’, ‘painful’, ‘cruel’, ‘untimely’, or ‘premature’.

The linking of *acerbus* with death is first attested in Plautus (*c.* 254–184 BCE), and the metaphorical association with untimely death was well established by the late first century BCE.⁴ However, for many authors, writings about death were not the dominant context in which the word was employed. Virgil (*c.* 70–19 BCE), for example, used *acerbus* (and related terms) on 15 occasions, none of which inferred a bitter taste, most of which inferred a metaphorical meaning of ‘cruel’, ‘hateful’, or ‘dire’, and five of which were linked to death.⁵ In most literary contexts, when related to dying

³ Concepción Fernández Martínez, ‘*Acerbus*: La amargura de morir antes de tiempo’, *Revista de lingüística y filología clásica*, 71.2 (2003), pp. 313–37.

⁴ Plaut. *Am.* 190; *As.* 595. Fernández Martínez, ‘*Acerbus*’, p. 326.

⁵ Verg. *Aen.* 5.49; 6. 429; 11.28; 11.587; 12. 678. See Fernández Martínez, ‘*Acerbus*’, pp. 322–23 (though focusing only on the premature death examples). Cicero was a prolific user of *acerbus* (and related terms), with the vast majority of uses (more than 100) inferring painful, harsh, bitter, cruel, unpleasant and acerbic experiences, emotions,

and the dead, *acerbus* was connected with words for death, such as *mors* and *funus*, and when the death was of a young person(s), both the untimely and emotionally painful aspects of the term coexisted. Most notable, in terms of illustrating meaning, are two occurrences in the *Aeneid* of *abstulit atra dies et funere mersit acerbo* (the black day snatched and plunged in bitter/untimely death) used to describe both infants in the underworld and the battle loss of the youthful Pallas.⁶ The notion was also expressed in prose. Quintilian (*c.* 35–100 CE), for example, used *mors acerba* when speaking of the undeserved death that faced his two sons and young wife, with the latter also snatched by ‘bitter/untimely fate’ (*acerbissimis rapta fatis*).⁷

Beyond an overall sense of being too soon or sudden, how the dead experienced the ‘bitterness’ of death was generally oblique. On a few occasions, deadly wounds were described with *acerbus*, highlighting the physicality and pain of dying as well as suggesting its emotional impact and/or untimely dimension. Ovid (43 BCE–17/18 CE), for example, had the 16-year-old Athis breathe his last due to a bitter/painful wound (*acerbo vulnere*).⁸ The remains of the dead or the grave were occasionally identified as bitter. Statius (*c.* 45–96 CE) spoke of bitter/untimely graves (*acerbis tumulis*) attended by parents, while the prose novelist Apuleius (*c.* 124–175 CE) suggested that the spirit (*manes*) of a man murdered by a friend might be vengeful and bitter.⁹ The latter evoked the anger and the potential restlessness of those who were taken violently or too soon and that their spirits might need to be placated.¹⁰ However, any bitter anger or resentment imagined as being experienced by the dead was often less apparent than the suffering of the survivors, who could be said to endure bitter/painful sorrow.¹¹ Martial (*c.* 39–104 CE) counted up the sweets (*dulcia*) and bitters

or speech. On only 13 occasions does Cicero associate the term with death(s), and is then often inferring suffering and pain (for the bereaved or the dying) as much as prematurity: *Quinct.* 15.50; *Verr.* 2.5.72; *Rab.* 14; 15; *Cael.* 24.59; *Tusc.* 1.93; 3.30; 3.66; 4.18; 5.121; *Fam.* 105 (15.2).6; 253 (4.12).2; 349 (11.28).4.

⁶ Virg. *Aen.* 6.429; 11.28.

⁷ Quint. *Inst.* 6. Praef. 4. Other examples of bitter fate: Verg. *Aen.* 11.587; Verg. *Culex* 210; Hor. *Epod.* 8.17; Sen. *Phaed.* 991; [Sen.] *Herc. Oet.* 838. As an epithet for characters and personifications, see: Hor. *Sat.* 2.6.19; [Lactant.] *Phoenix* 20.

⁸ Ov. *Met.* 5.62. See also Verg. *Aen.* 11.823; Ov. *Met.* 12.388; Stat. *Theb.* 9.8.

⁹ Stat. *Silv.* 5.5.40; Apul. *Met.* 8.9. Note also Catull. 68a. 90 (*acerba cinis*).

¹⁰ Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 146; Fanny Dolankys, ‘Nocturnal Rites to Appease the Untimely Dead: The Lemuria in Its Socio-Historical Context’, *Mouseion* 16 Suppl. 1 (2019), pp. 36–60; compare Charles W. King, *The Ancient Roman Afterlife. Di Manes, Belief and the Cult of the Dead* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2020), pp. 164–71.

¹¹ For example: Cic. *Cael.* 24.59; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.121; Auson. *Parent.* 11.2; Amm. Marc. 25.13. Note also Lucr. 3.53; Cic. *Rab.* 14; Ov. *Pont.* 1.9.5; Sen. *Polyb.* 17.2; Sen. *Oed.* 56;

(*amaris*) of his 34-year friendship with Julius, noting that to avoid bitterness (*acerba*) it would be better not to have friends at all, yet although this would lessen grief it would also lessen joy.¹² Seneca (c. 4 BCE–65 CE) hinted at the two sides of a bitter death, that it was awful for the dead and the bereaved, when writing a prose consolation to Polybius. Seneca did this by focusing the pain of the bereaved onto the dead, noting that nothing would be more bitter (*acerbius*) to Polybius' brother than knowing that his death was so bitter (*casus acerbus*) to Polybius.¹³

It was the deaths of adult males, generally those still relatively young on the cusp of career, marriage, parenthood, or success that were most often characterised as bitter/untimely, and rarely the demise of young children.¹⁴ Seneca, for example, described the death of the Elder Drusus (died 9 BCE, aged 29) as an *acerbo funere*.¹⁵ Seneca also put into the mouth of Nature that any death or funeral of a child, whether a boy, youth, or old man, would be bitter/untimely (*acerbum funus*) when a parent attended.¹⁶ It was not childhood or even youth that made a death a bitter experience, but the sense that the death was perceived by survivors as premature. Moreover, many deaths could also be couched as sudden and unexpected and thus in some senses untimely. Livy (59 BCE–17 CE) noted that the death of Marcus Furius Camillus during the plague of 365 BCE was a bitter/untimely death

Sen. *Phaed.* 1275; [Quint] *Decl. Maj.* 6.1.4; [Lactant.] *Phoenix* 20. For *acerba memoria*, see Livy 25.28.5.

¹² Mart. 12.34.

¹³ Sen. *Polyb.* 5.3.

¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Néraudau, 'La loi, la coutume et le chagrin. Réflexions sur la mort des enfants', in *La mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain*, ed. by F. Hinard (Caen: Université de Caen, 1987), pp. 195–208. Age categories assigned to life stages could be fluid and therefore boundaries between childhood and adulthood unclear, see Tim Parkin, 'Life Cycle', in *A Cultural History of Childhood and the Family in Antiquity*, ed. by M. Harlow and R. Laurence (Oxford: Berg, 2010), pp. 97–114. Here use of terms such as infant, young child, child, and young adult is intended to be approximate rather than precise.

¹⁵ Sen. *Marc.* 4.2. Other examples linked to adults and (likely) late teens: Plaut. *Am.* 190; *As.* 595 (female); Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.72; *Cael.* 24.59; *Rab.* 14; 15; *Tusc.* 3.30; 3.66; *Fam.* 105 (15.2).6; 253 (4.12).2; 349 (11.28).4; Livy 7.1.9; 25.38.5; Corn. Nep. *Cimon* 4.4; Verg. *Aen.* 11.28; 11.587 (female); 12.678; Catull. 68a.90; Hor. *Epod.* 8.17; Ov. *Pont.* 1.9.5; Val Max. 6.1; Sen. *Suas.* 6.22; Sen. *Marc.* 16.4; *Polyb.* 5.3; *Phaed.* 991; [Sen.] *Herc. Oct.* 1419 (female); Stat. *Theb.* 9.8; 2.690; Sil. *Pun.* 13.387; Mart. 12.34; Plin. *Ep.* 4.21 (female); 5.5.4; Apul. *Met.* 6.26; 8.8; 8.9; 10.25 (female); Auson. *Parent.* 14; 20; Aus. *Prof. Burd.* 3; 24. Examples linked to children and young teens (though note that ages are rarely given): Cic. *Tusc.* 1.93; Verg. *Aen.* 6.429; Ov. *Met.* 5.62; Sen. *Marc.* 9.2; Quint. *Inst.* 6. *Praef.* 4; Tac. *Ann.* 13.17; Plin. *Ep.* 5.16.6 (female); Apul. *Met.* 7.27; 10.5; Auson. *Parent.* 11.2; 29.6.

¹⁶ Sen. *Marc.* 17.7. See also 18.8.

(*mors acerba*), even though he was a mature (*matura*) man (likely over 80); Silius Italicus (c. 26–101 CE) described Scipio Africanus as shedding tears for the bitter/untimely deaths (*funera acerba*) in war (211 BCE) of his father and uncle, both probably in their 50s; and Cicero (106–43 BCE) described the sight of the murder of 57-year-old Pompey (48 BCE) as bitter/painful (*acerbissimo spectaculo*).¹⁷ The Younger Pliny (c. 61–113 CE), commenting on the literary output of great authors, also observed that for him death always seemed bitter and premature (*acerba et immatura mors*) when it left an immortal work incomplete.¹⁸

It was the sense that a life was unfinished, that an individual had been taken before their time, which marked a bitter death. There may have been a well-known maxim of, ‘death is fortunate for childhood, bitter for youth, and too late for old age’, but the boundary between youth and old age was a matter of perception bound up with the societal value and contribution of the individual.¹⁹ For male authors, a young child’s death, despite Virgil’s infants in the underworld, was rarely to be described as bitter or untimely. *Acerbus* did convey a sense of real pain and loss but it also served to rationalise and justify any public expression of grief as something that was genuinely deserved by the (usually male) dead person.

Bitter Death – Epitaphs

In Latin epitaphs, death, dying, and bereavement could also be bitter. However, given the thousands upon thousands of epitaphs that have survived, the occurrence rate of *acerbus* and related terms is not high, and the majority of examples are found in verse inscriptions.²⁰ Epigraphically,

¹⁷ Livy 7.1.9; Sil. *Pun.* 13.387; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.121. Compare also Corn. Nep. *Cimon.* 4.4.

¹⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 5.5.4. Deaths could also be termed *immaturus* which conveyed more unequivocally a sense of prematurity (Fernández Martínez, ‘Los adjetivos Latinos’, p. 134), but usage is less frequent (especially in poetry) than *acerbus*, and most examples are associated with male adult death. For example: Cic. *Brut.* 126; Sall. *Jug.* 14.22; Livy 2.40.9; Vell. Pat. 2.3.3; 2.116.4; Sen. *Marc.* 20.6; 21.1; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.89; Plin. *Ep.* 2.1.10; 6.6.7. Note also a cluster of occurrences that quote Cicero, ‘death cannot be premature (*immatura*) for a consul’: Cic. *Cat.* 4.3; Cic. *Phil.* 2.119; Sen. *Controv.* 7.10; *Suas.* 6.12; 6.22; Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.109.

¹⁹ *Mors infanti felix, iuveni acerba, nimis sera est seni*: Publ. Sy. *Sent.* 401. In late antiquity, there may have been different implications, with Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636 CE) observing that there were three sorts of death, ‘*acerba* is the death of infants, *immatura* the death of young people, *naturalis* the merited death of the elderly’, *Etym.* 11.2.32.

²⁰ Excluding fragmentary epitaphs and Christian epitaphs of the third century and later, 79 epitaphs using forms of *acerbus* and *acervus* are identified here: *CIL*: 2, 313; 3, 12928; 3, 14190; 5, 2013; 5, 5701; 5, 5709; 5, 7917; 5, 8652; 6, 1619; 6, 6189; 6, 7574; 6, 7872; 6, 9150; 6, 9199; 6, 9437; 6, 10097; 6, 14389; 6, 15837; 6, 19007; 6, 20462; 6, 23551; 6, 23818; 6, 24243; 6, 24659; 6, 25128; 6, 25703; 6, 26680; 6, 28239; 6, 30126;

acerbus was used across the empire but with a clear concentration in Rome and Italy, with most examples dated to the first and second century CE.²¹ Establishing the original context and display settings for these epitaphs is mostly impossible, but examples include inscribed ash urns, altars, stelae, and sarcophagi, as well as some titular epitaphs.²² The social milieu was mixed with the epitaphs commemorating (or set up by) *equites*, soldiers, artisans, free-born citizens, and enslaved persons, but in general the background of those composing or commissioning these epitaphs was modest (albeit a literate group able to afford inscriptions) compared with the predominantly elite authored literary texts.

A small number of these epitaphs used *acerbus* in connection with the unripe fruit metaphor. Domitias Tatias commemorated his very sweet daughter (name and age lost) and noted that just as apples on a tree, human bodies either fall when ripe (*matura*) or, if bitter/unripe (*acerva*), may plummet quickly to the ground.²³ In the majority of the epitaphs, *acerbus* was associated not with fruit but with a variety of nouns, although *mors* and *funus* were most common.²⁴ Often the epitaphs communicated that the deceased was taken by or met a ‘bitter death’, inferring an untimely end. Uses of *acerbus* with day (*dies*) and fate or lot (*fatum*) could also convey the sense that the deceased died too soon, thus two young *equites* (aged 20 and 18), commemorated by their mother, were engulfed by bitter/untimely fate.²⁵ Several of the epitaphs used or adapted the Virgil quotation (*abstulit atra dies et funere mersit acerbo*), and there is some debate as to the origins of this expression and how much Virgil was influenced by popular sentiments

6, 33696; 6, 34271; 6, 35508; 6, 38425; 6, 28721; 8, 5001; 8, 2952; 8,9048; 8, 9084; 8, 26238; 9, 175; 9, 1757; 9, 3948; 9, 3968; 9, 5012; 9, 5557; 9, 6888; 9, 7007; 9, 7271; 10, 1784; 10, 4362; 10, 4728; 10, 4915; 10, 5429; 10, 5798; 11, 654; 11, 1086; 11, 1209; 11, 3771; 11, 5784; 11, 5796; 11, 6078; 11, 6080; 11, 6180; 11, 6926; 11, 7024; 13, 2027; 13, 7234; 13, 8355; 14, 1731; 14, 3333; *CLE*: 1076; 2083; 2121. *CLE Afrique*: 49. *AE*: 1985, 162; 2006, 473; 2006, 1774; 2011, 1771. Lupa 23276. Of these, 57 are associated with verse epitaphs.

²¹ Rome: 27 examples (cf. 22 examples in Beryl Rawson, ‘The Express Route to Hades’, in *Thinking Like a Lawyer. Essays on Legal History and General History for John Crook on His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. by P. McKenchie (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 271–88); Italy: 30 examples. Note, it is rarely possible to date epitaphs with any precision.

²² For example, *CIL* 6, 1619 (titular epitaph); *CIL* 6, 20462 (sarcophagus); *CIL* 6, 33696 (urn); *CIL* 6, 34271 (stela).

²³ *CIL* 6, 7574 = *CLE* 1490. See also *CIL* 11, 7024 = *CLE* 1542; *AE* 1985, 162. Note also examples of fruit metaphor that do not contain *acerbus*: *CLE* 1543; *CIL* 12, 533 = *CLE* 465; *AE* 2002, 167.

²⁴ 41 of the epitaphs employ variants of *mors acerba* and *funere acerbo*.

²⁵ *CIL* 6, 1619 = *CLE* 2181. For fate, see also: *CIL* 2, 313; *CIL* 5, 7917 = *CLE* 404; *CIL* 6, 25703 = *CLE* 1537; *CIL* 10, 4362 = *CLE* 362; *CIL* 11, 6080 = *CLE* 1823; *CLE* 2083. For *dies*: *CIL* 6, 15837 = *CLE* 1304; *CIL* 9, 7007 = *CLE* 1169; *CIL* 13, 7234 = *CLE* 1005.

and versifying, but the repetition at the very least suggests a certain commonality in voicing loss.²⁶

A bitter death took away youth and prospects and sometimes this ‘bitterness’ was closely aligned in the epitaphs with the dead person, youth becoming bitter (emphasising premature death) as well as bones and urns.²⁷ The physical pain of death and disease and the suffering that the dying endured, could also be evoked by *acerbus*.²⁸ The emotional torment of bereaved survivors, with their bitter tears, bitter complaints, and bitter sorrow, was also often apparent.²⁹ The dead may have been snatched by untimely death, but it was the living who were left in pain and grief. The child *Peculiaris*, his commemorators (names now lost) noted, never caused bitterness (*acerbus*) except through his death, and the husband of *Platoria* (aged 26) observed that she brought no sorrow (*dolor*) except by her bitter/untimely death.³⁰

The majority of epigraphic uses of *acerbus* were embedded in poems, with the sentiment of ‘bitterness’ often being only one part of a larger commentary. These epitaphs might note the cause of death; the profession of the deceased; the skills, qualities, or attributes of the dead person; imagine the underworld; complain about fate and loss; or note the tears of the bereaved. Most of the poetic epitaphs – by recording what was perceived to be special about the deceased and/or noting intense emotions caused by the death – served to commemorate both the dead person and the grief of the bereaved, explaining and sharing that grief. As the parents of the infant *Speratus* observed, ‘who would not sorrow at this example of a bitter/untimely death?’³¹ The suffering was the survivors’ but it was the

²⁶ Verg. *Aen.* 6.429; 11.28. *CIL* 3, 14190 = *CLE* 2001; *CIL* 8, 26238 = *CLE* 2002; *CIL* 9, 5012 = *CLE* 649; *CIL* 9, 7271; *CIL* 10, 4728 = *CLE* 813; *CIL* 11, 3771 = *CLE* 430; *CIL* 14, 3333 = *CLE* 608; *AE* 2006, 1774. For discussion, see John William Zarker, ‘A Vergilian Verse in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*’, *Classical Journal*, 57.3 (1961), pp. 112–16; Fernández Martínez, ‘Los adjetivos Latinos’, pp. 329–33; Joan Gómez Pallarès, ‘Vergilius epigraphicus. ¿Mors immatura al final de la Eneida?’, *Athenaeum*, 101.1 (2013), pp. 183–200. Note also later Christian examples: *CIL* 5, 6221 = *CLE* 695; *ICUR* 1, 713 = *CLE* 682; *ICUR* 7, 18591 = *CLE* 732.

²⁷ *CIL* 9, 3948 (*iueni acerbissimo*); *AE* 2006, 473 (*iuvenem acerbum*); *CIL* 6 9199 = *CLE* 1080 (*ossa acerba*); *CIL* 6, 6189 = *CLE* 997 (*arcula acerba*).

²⁸ For implied painful deaths (though other aspects of *acerbus* are inferred): *CIL* 6, 38425 = *CLE* 1948 (physical attack); *CIL* 8, 9048 (disease); *CIL* 9, 3968 = *CLE* 498 (childbirth); *CIL* 13, 2027 (crushed to death by a wall during a fire).

²⁹ *CIL* 6, 28239 = *CLE* 1671 (*lacrimis acerbis*); *CLE* 2121 (*acerba querimonia*); *AE* 2011, 1771 (*acerbissimum luctum*). See also *CIL* 6, 33696; *CIL* 6, 34271; *CIL* 9, 175 = *CLE* 1572.

³⁰ *CIL* 6, 38721; *CIL* 6, 24243. Compare also *CIL* 11, 6078; *AE* 1985, 162; and also the sentiment that no one had spoken ill/bitterly of the dead: *CIL* 6, 7872 = *CLE* 971; *CIL* 6, 23551 = *CLE* 970.

³¹ *CIL* 6, 26680 = *CLE* 1173.

prematurity of loss that added the sting. That a ‘bitter death’ inferred an early death was frequently made clear by further epigraphic content that emphasised youthfulness or childish qualities. For example, the dead were taken in the flower of their youth or snatched from a mother’s arms.³²

The majority of the epitaphs that included usages of *acerbus* also stated an age at death, a feature of only a minority of all epitaphs that survive from the Roman world.³³ Where ages were given, most were children and youths, frequently commemorated by their parents, with more boys and young men recorded than girls and young women.³⁴ The idea of ‘bitterness’ was employed by some spouses at the loss of youthful partners but seems to have had little currency in epitaph composition for those who died beyond their mid-20s.³⁵ As with literary uses, the definition of what was bitter/untimely was with the author, and there was no formal cut-off age that delimited premature death. Nevertheless, the term was often utilised

³² Flower of youth/life: *CIL* 5, 8652 = *CLE* 629; *CIL* 6, 23551 = *CLE* 970; *CIL* 8, 5001; *AE* 2011, 1771. Taken from a mother’s arms/breast: *CIL* 6, 23551 = *CLE* 970; *CIL* 8, 26238 = *CLE* 2002; *CIL* 9, 7007 = *CLE* 1169; *CLE* 1076. Note also references to first trimming of beard: *CIL* 5, 8652 = *CLE* 629; *CIL* 6, 38425 = *CLE* 1948; and premature (*immatura*) deaths: *CIL* 5, 7917; *CIL* 6, 24659 = *CLE* 93; *CIL* 9, 175 = *CLE* 1572; *CLE* 1076. *Mors immatura* could be used instead of *mors acerba*, though its use is less common, Fernández Martínez, ‘Los adjetivos Latinos’, p. 134; and there are some regional differences in uses of *immatura*, Nicolas Katarzynski, ‘La *mors immatura* dans l’épigraphie des Alpes-Maritimes’, *Sylloge Epigraphica Barcinonensis*, 13 (2015), pp. 13–24. For ‘untimely’ death in Greek epigrams, compare also Ewald Griessmair, *Das Motiv der Mors immatura in den griechischen metrischen Grabinschriften*, *Comemntationes Aenipontanae* 17 (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1966); Marta González González, *Funerary Epigrams of Ancient Greece. Reflections on Literature, Society and Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 57–76.

³³ In the region of 20–30 per cent of all epitaphs included an age statement: Valerie M. Hope, ‘Age and the Roman Army: The Evidence of Tombstones’, in *Age and Ageing in the Roman Empire*, ed. by M. Harlow and R. Laurence, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* Suppl. 65 (Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2007), pp. 111–12; Christian Laes, ‘Latin Inscriptions and the Life Course. Regio III (Bruttium and Lucania) as a Test Case’, *Arctos*, 46 (2012), p. 97.

³⁴ 60 (76%) of the 79 epitaphs give ages for 62 individuals: 0–4 years = 7 (11%); 5–9 years = 15 (24%); 10–14 years = 7 (11%); 15–19 years = 9 (15%); 20–24 years = 13 (21%); 25–29 years = 6 (10%); 30 years or more = 5 (8%). Gender can be established on 76 of the epitaphs for 82 commemorated individuals, with 55 (67%) being male and 27 (33%) being female. Where commemorators are named (or names still survive), 48 are parents.

³⁵ Use by spouses: *CIL* 3, 12928; *CIL* 5, 5709; *CIL* 6, 9150; *CIL* 6, 24243; *CIL* 11, 6080 = *CLE* 1823; *CLE* 2121; Lupa 23276. The oldest person is a 45-year-old soldier whose death day was bitter/untimely (*acerba dies*), *CIL* 13, 7234 = *CLE* 1005. A 40-year-old man’s epitaph noted that those who deserve to live die by bitter/untimely fate (*fato acerbo*), *CIL* 5, 7917 = *CLE* 404.

by parents who lost children who were near or in early adulthood, but (and notably more so than in literary usage) the term was also frequently employed by the commemorators of children, who were in their early teens and younger, including some infants.³⁶ The sweet daughter, Atilia Manilia, for example, was taken from her mother's arms and engulfed by bitter/untimely death at 360 days old.³⁷

In epitaphs, there was scope to acknowledge the impact of the deaths of the young and *acerbus* emphasised suffering. Some of the 'acerbus' epitaphs were particularly bleak. A mother who died of grief following the death of her daughter; bereft parents left in endless weeping; lost talent and hopes reduced to no more than ashes.³⁸ A few epitaphs, however, while acknowledging a bitter death also expressed (sometimes via the imagined voice of the deceased) consolatory arguments: the bereaved had to stop crying and accept that everyone dies, including the children of kings.³⁹ For a bereaved parent, the loss of their own child was personal and intense and could be powerfully expressed by the concept of 'bitterness', yet simultaneously a *mors acerba* was not a unique or unusual experience, and individual losses coexisted with the bigger and communal picture. Moreover, in the vast majority of epitaphs for children and youths, *acerbus* simply did not feature; the bitterness associated with an untimely death was often left unspoken, but was perhaps no less understood.

A Bitter Funeral?

Did the meaning of *acerbus*, as akin to bitter and untimely, see it used to designate a distinctive funeral, a *funus acerbum*? Different categories of funerals are attested (e.g. *funus plebeium*, *funus indictivum*) inferring ritual distinctions most often aligned with the status and identity of the deceased person and/or their family. Yet, with the exception of the *funus publicum*, none of these terms are well attested and thus understanding if and how these funerals may have differed is usually a matter of inferring the presence or absence of (or variations in) certain elements, such as the scale of the procession or the delivery of a eulogy in the forum.⁴⁰ Evidence for the

³⁶ 15–24 years = 36%; 0–14 years = 46%.

³⁷ *CIL* 8, 26238 = *CLE* 2002 (*funere mersit acerbo*).

³⁸ *CLE* 1076; *CIL* 5, 8652 = *CLE* 629; *CIL* 6, 26680 = *CLE* 1173; *CIL* 6, 10097 = *CLE* 1111; *CIL* 6, 23818 = *CLE* 977.

³⁹ *CIL* 6,7872 = *CLE* 971; *CIL* 6, 23551 = *CLE* 970; *CIL* 11, 7024 = *CLE* 1542.

⁴⁰ For the *funus publicum* and *funus censorium*, see Gabriele Wesch-Klein, *Funus Publicum. Eine Studie zur öffentlichen Beisetzung und Gewährung von Ehrengräbern in Rom und den Westprovinzen* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), and these likely overlapped with a *funus indictivum* (e.g. *Cic. Leg.* 2.2.4; *Suet. Iul.* 84). Funerals of the non-elite may have been designated *funus plebeium*, *funus tacitum*, or *funus vulgare*, though these terms are not well

existence of a specific type of rite for the young is limited, but there are some indications that such funerals could be carried out rapidly, at night and by torchlight.

The fullest reference to such distinctive rites for the young is to be found in Servius' commentary on the *Aeneid*, written during the late fourth or early fifth century CE. When considering Virgil's reference to the use of torches at the return of the body of Pallas (*Aeneid* 11.143), Servius explained that traditionally funerals of non-adults (*inpuberes*) were held at night by torchlight to prevent the house being polluted, and this was especially the case if a son of a magistrate (*magistratu*) had died. The body of Pallas was thus accompanied by torches since this was a *funus acerbum*. Servius also stated that, according to some authors, the deaths of children under their father's authority (*potestas*) would not have been fully celebrated, since such children were akin to slaves, and, quoting Varro (116–27 BCE) and Verrius Flaccus (c. 55 BCE–20 CE), he noted that if a son (*filius familias*) died away from the city, the body was returned at night with tapers and torches by friends and freedmen, with no one invited to the funeral.

Servius was writing some four hundred years after Virgil while providing commentary on a poem set in a mythical past, so the applicability of his observations to Rome at any given period is questionable. The details Servius inferred about restricted use of torches, pollution, and night-time events have been challenged. John Scheid has argued that torches featured not just in children's funerals but also in all adult and daytime funerals, serving to mark symbolically funereal space. Allison Emmerson has dismissed suggestions that in ancient Rome the dead were somehow viewed as spiritually or religiously polluting. And Maureen Carroll, focusing on infant deaths specifically, has rejected 'the whole idea of hurried, marginal and torch-lit burials'.⁴¹ However, Servius was not implying that all burials on all occasions of all children were executed in a similar fashion and he was speaking of archaic behaviour that required explanation. Moreover, there is some other evidence that at least the memory (and significance) of aspects of these traditions persisted, even if the actions themselves rarely did.

According to Tacitus (c. 56–120 CE), the emperor Nero justified the night-time burial of his step-brother, the same day as he died (55 CE), as a

attested: Ov. *Tr.* 1.3.22; Prop. 2.13.24; Sen. *Tranq.* 13–14; Luc. 8.736. *SHA Marc.* 13.6. Military funerals may have had distinctive aspects, and if a corpse was absent, a funeral in effigy (*funus imaginarium*) could be held.

⁴¹ John Scheid, *Contraria facere: Renversements et déplacements dans les rites funéraires* (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1984), pp. 122–26; Allison L. C. Emmerson, 'Re-Examining Roman Death Pollution', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 110 (2020), pp. 5–27; Maureen Carroll, *Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World: 'A Fragment of Time'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 152.

traditional response (*maioribus institutum*) to bitter/untimely deaths (*acerba funera*) which should not be placed before public eyes with processions and eulogies. Britannicus was, however, an almost 14-year-old rival claimant to imperial power whose father was already dead, making his rapid disposal and the need for it to be excused as traditional, downright suspicious, or at least that is the interpretation that Tacitus puts upon it.⁴² Seneca, writing in the mid first century CE, linked torches and tapers specifically with funerals of the untimely dead on several occasions, suggesting some persistence of the relationship between torch-lit funerals and youthful death. For example, in the final lines of *De Brevitate Vitae*, in decrying people who plan their own tombs, pyres, and funerals, Seneca noted that such funerals ought instead to be conducted by torches and tapers (*faces et cereos*) as if the deceased had lived the shortest span; and in the play *Hercules Furens*, of those entering the underworld, it is noted that only infants (*infans*) are accompanied by torches (*igne*) to relieve the darkness (*relevare noctu*).⁴³ Latin literature does make frequent references to funeral torches, but the vast majority of these are directly associated with the lighting of the pyre rather than being overtly linked with the funeral procession; this is to say that the evidence for the presence (and roles) of torches at adult funerals is not as clear cut as is sometimes assumed.⁴⁴

One potentially important piece of evidence that has often been overlooked in the dismissal of the existence of a *funus acerbum* lies in an inscription from Puteoli concerning the responsibilities of public undertakers.⁴⁵ These rules, dating to the first century BCE, noted that undertakers were to give priority to a *funus aceruom*, with *aceruom* thought to be an archaic form of *acerbum*.⁴⁶ What counted as such a death was not

⁴² Tac. *Ann.* 13.17. Compare Cic. *Clu.* 28.

⁴³ Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 20.5; *Herc.* 855–56. See also Sen. *Ep.* 122.10 (*funere acerbo; face et cereos*); *Tranq.* 11.7 (*immaturas exequias fax cereusque*).

⁴⁴ Gordon M. Rushforth, 'Funeral Lights in Roman Sepulchral Monuments', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 5 (1915), pp. 149–64; Pierre Boyance, 'Funus acerbum', *Revue des études anciennes*, 54 (1952), pp. 284–85; Valerie M. Hope, 'The Smells of Death: Tracing the Odours of a Roman Funeral', in *City of Senses: Embodied Experience in Ancient Rome*, ed. by E. Betts (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, Forthcoming). Scheid, *Renversements et déplacements*, pp. 123–24, notes that Seneca may be referring to funeral processions specifically, but does not look at the references in detail. Torches are pictured at the laying out of the body on the Haterii relief but not in the only depiction of a funeral (the Amiternum relief), though note Scheid, *Renversements et déplacements*, p. 126.

⁴⁵ *AE* 1971, 88, II, 19–20; Silvio Panciera et al., 'Il punto d'arrivo. Le leges: Nuove letture e integrazioni', in *Libitina e dintorni (Libitina 3)*, ed. by S. Panciera (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2004), p. 49. This evidence is not considered by Carroll (*Infancy*) or Scheid (*Renversements et déplacements*), although the latter is focusing primarily on torches.

⁴⁶ Rawson, 'Express Route', pp. 271–72.

specified, but Beryl Rawson has argued, following Servius, that it may infer those still in *potestas*.⁴⁷ The other group given priority for funeral planning in the Puteoli regulations were the decurions (or town councillors). Rawson suggests that these two groups were linked by the need to minimise the public disruption caused by these deaths, and indeed the death of a decurion, with his term of service incomplete, could also be seen as untimely.⁴⁸ It may not have been the case that the resulting funerals were rushed or even simplified (and decurions may have been voted splendid public funerals), but that efficient completion of the rites allowed mourners, including fellow members of the town council in the case of a death of a decurion, to return to public business promptly.

The Puteoli rules may have been only relevant to a specific time and place and reveal little as to how and why a *funus acerbum* may have been distinctive. Rawson also notes that treating the funerals of the young differently would have soon afterwards been out of line with social expectations, since by the late Republic children were highly cherished, could be buried and commemorated elaborately, and rarely hurriedly at night-time, so if a distinctive *funus acerbum* (as described by Servius) ever existed, it was likely redundant by the late first century BCE.⁴⁹ Yet the Puteoli inscription does not indicate that a *funus aceruom* was associated with marginalising or dismissing the deaths of the young or due to fears of pollution.⁵⁰ It could be argued, instead, that the Puteoli regulation suggests some elevation of these deaths by associating them with the rites for decurions. Were these deaths being treated as special, and in need of a quick response, in an acknowledgement of the upset and potential disruption occasioned by the untimely loss of the young?⁵¹

The evidence for a distinctive *funus acerbum* is inconclusive at best, consisting of snippets of information from different times and places, of different forms and genre. There is a risk of creating a composite rite that

⁴⁷ Rawson, 'Express Route', p. 277.

⁴⁸ Rawson, 'Express Route', pp. 280–84.

⁴⁹ Rawson, 'Express Route', pp. 278–79. See also Néraudau, 'La loi'; Suzanne Dixon, 'The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family', in *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. by B. Rawson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), pp. 99–113.

⁵⁰ Note also suggestions that spirits of the untimely dead could be viewed as restless, or even malevolent, see Dolansky, 'Nocturnal Rites'; although this is dismissed by Carroll for dead infants (*Infancy*, pp. 151–52).

⁵¹ John Bodet, 'Death and Social Death in Ancient Rome', in *On Human Bondage. After Slavery and Social Death*, ed. by J. Bodet and W. Scheidel (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), p. 92, 'special deaths'. Note that the Puteoli regulations elsewhere also advocate the rapid disposal of the bodies of slaves, and this could be related to Servius' comments (see above) about the similarities, at death, between slaves and children, Bodet, 'Death', pp. 92–93.

overlooks these differences and also differences related to the individual identities of specific children; for example, in status (elite or poor), legal condition (under *potestas* or not; free or enslaved), and relative age (infant, child, youth) or gender. The evidence for distinctive features – that funerals might be rapid (note Servius, Tacitus, and the Puteoli regulations), held at night (note Servius and Tacitus), and by torchlight (note Servius and Seneca) – are also very limited. At most it can be suggested that there was some acknowledgement that funeral rituals for children, likely citizen children under *potestas* (and this could include young adults), could differ to those for adult citizens.⁵² However, children's funerals – whether involving some of the supposed features of a *funus acerbum* or not – may have always lacked certain elements of an elite male adult funeral, such as a eulogy delivered in the forum, the complexity of the procession, and the length of any subsequent (female) mourning. Moreover, for the bulk of the population, any funeral would likely have been rapid and basic, often without speeches and ostentation, and this was the case regardless of the age of the deceased. Many funerals may not have been dissimilar to a putative *funus acerbum*. The latter, if it involved the distinction of burial at night by torchlight, may have only ever applied to certain child deaths, and by the late first century BCE, it was likely a rarity. Yet, we should not underestimate the potential importance of the memory of such traditions, that there was a residual sense that these deaths were somehow special, that things could be done differently, and may have been done differently in the past, and this could have shaped both funeral actions and discussions of child death in the Roman present.

Grief or Mourning?

The uses of *acerbus* are complex and potentially contradictory. If the *funus acerbum* existed, some of its potential features (e.g. rapid disposal) seem inconsistent with literary and epigraphic uses of *acerbus* and out of kilter with the bitter pain that parents claimed at the deaths of their children. Yet this inconsistency is perhaps not surprising and is in line with other, seemingly contradictory, evidence for ancient attitudes towards child death.

In 1988, Mark Golden asked 'did the ancients care when their children died?'⁵³ This was a question that sprung from research on other historical periods that had proposed that in pre-industrial populations, high infant

⁵² Bodel, 'Death', p. 92, suggests children up to (approximately) the age of 25, which would broadly fit with epigraphic uses of *acerbus*.

⁵³ Mark Golden, 'Did the Ancients Care When Their Children Died?', *Greece and Rome*, 35.2 (1988), pp. 152–63.

mortality created limited emotional commitment towards young children.⁵⁴ In many respects, ancient Rome would seem to be comparable: child mortality must have been high; some parents distanced themselves from their young by employing wet-nurses and child-minders; unwanted infants could be abandoned; and strident voices stated that the young should not be mourned for.⁵⁵ Golden, however, by considering evidence attesting affection and grief for children as well as comparative data from societies with high infant mortality, concluded that the ancients very much did care when their children died.

In the decades that have followed, Golden's response has been further supported, albeit with the caveat that poverty, abuse, and servitude must have marked and defined many experiences. However, it remains easier to evidence parental affection for and grief at the loss of children who were near to or already fulfilling their potential than for very young children. It is, for example, not babies and toddlers (despite likely representing the bulk of child mortality) who were most often commemorated on funerary monuments, but older children.⁵⁶ This too is reflected in epigraphic and literary uses of *acerbus*, a term more often applied to the untimely deaths of teenagers and young adults than of infants. There also remains the question of how to integrate the proposal that all children were equally grieved for, with ancient pronouncements that dead babies and young children could be treated differently to others, and that mourning times were restricted for those aged under 10 years, and near non-existent for those aged less than 3 years.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See esp. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by R. Baldick (New York: Vintage, 1962 [first published in French, 1960]); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Keith R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family. Studies in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 98–132.

⁵⁶ Margaret King, 'Commemoration of Infants on Roman Funerary Inscriptions', in *The Epigraphy of Death. Studies in the History and Society of Greece and Rome*, ed. by G. Oliver (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 117–54; Janette McWilliam, 'Children Among the Dead: The Influence of Urban Life on the Commemoration of Children on Tombstone Inscriptions', in *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World*, ed. by S. Dixon (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 74–98; Jason Mander, *Portraits of Children on Roman Funerary Monuments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Christian Laes, 'The Youngest Children in Latin Epigraphy', in *Infant Health and Death in Roman Italy and Beyond*, ed. by E.-J. Graham and M. Carroll, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* Suppl. 96 (Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2014), pp. 131–44.

⁵⁷ Cic. *Tusc.* 1.93–94; Sen. *Ep.* 99.2–3; Plin. *HN* 7.15.72; Juv. *Sat.* 15.138–40; Plut. *Num.* 12.1; Plut. *Cons. Ux.* 11; Paulus *Sent.* 1.21.13–14; Ulpian *Frag. Vat.* 321; Fulgent. *Exp. Serm.* 7.

The answer has often been to dismiss or rationalise any ancient evidence that suggests negative attitudes towards or non-emotional responses to child and infant death. Archaeological remains and epitaphs can be marshalled to demonstrate that infants were disposed of with due process and considered rites. Male, elite, philosophical voices that condemned emotional reactions to child death are viewed as not representing Roman society overall; and laws regulating mourning for children are regarded as antiquated, likely impossible to enforce, and/or of little practical relevance to the majority of the population.⁵⁸ However, in all these useful attempts to align attitudes towards the deaths of young children with attitudes towards the deaths of older children and adults, there is a risk of ignoring and/or misunderstanding what at least some of this evidence infers: the existence of specific expectations and laws.

I am not suggesting (once more) that child death in ancient Rome was treated with indifference, only that the full range of evidence indicates that certain restrictive traditions concerning child death coexisted with attestations of parental grief. These seemingly conflicting perspectives can perhaps be squared by employing a more nuanced understanding of the expression of grief in the Roman world, and, importantly, how grief could differ to mourning. In modern English usage, ‘grieving’ and ‘mourning’ are often employed interchangeably, but they can be defined in different ways. Grief is the emotional, often uncontrolled (or instinctive), and sometimes primarily private, reaction to loss; whereas mourning is the more public expression, or processes and actions that accommodate loss.⁵⁹ Mourning entails expectations, rituals, and performance in a way that grief may not. For the Roman world, the distinction between grief and mourning, between emotion and ritual, may have been marked. Grief could be couched as something natural, whereas mourning was considered a social and cultural performance, even if the boundaries between private (grief) and public (mourning) were often fluid.⁶⁰ Indeed in many cultural settings, grief and

⁵⁸ See, for example, King, ‘Commemoration of Infants’; McWilliam, ‘Children Among the Dead’; Valerie M. Hope, *Roman Death: The Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 121–41; Maureen Carroll, ‘Infant Death and Burial in Roman Italy’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 24 (2011), p. 99; Maureen Carroll, “No Part in Earthly Things”. The Death, Burial and Commemoration of Newborn Children and Infants in Roman Italy’, in *Families in the Roman and Late Antique World*, ed. by M. Harlow and L. Larsson Loven (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 42–45.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Margaret S. Stroebe et al., ‘Introduction: Concepts and Issues in Contemporary Research on Bereavement’, in *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping and Care*, ed. by M. S. Stroebe et al. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), p. 6.

⁶⁰ For naturalness of grief, for example, Sen. *Marc.* 7.1; [Plut.] *Ad. Apol.* 102 C–D. For ancient definitions of grief as an emotion, largely based on philosophical discourse,

mourning may collide or merge (although the ways and extent to which this is acceptable may be culturally specific). There is then a need to consider the available evidence in terms of both grief *and* mourning, and not only as evidence for or against grief as has previously often been the case, and to acknowledge that grief and mourning may be separate and coexistent in ways that at times may even seem incompatible.

If the *funus acerbum* ever existed, this was related to ritual actions and public recognition of the death; it was about mourning not grief and was not a measure of the emotions of the bereaved. Expected funeral behaviours may not match sorrow, and there can be tensions, with some individuals finding rituals too restrictive, others too expressive. Yet rituals still provide structure and routine, offer consolation and support, while normalising a common (and shared) human experience of loss.⁶¹ Further, rituals are a cultural script, guide, or reference point, but not necessarily, always fixed, whether chronologically or socially, and the hazy evidence for the *funus acerbum* may well indicate such flexibility. In origin, the *funus acerbum* may have sought to distinguish the deaths of some children from some adults, exactly why remains uncertain, but it may have been related to the social status of the deceased child and the perceived potential impact on parents (and thus the wider community) of these deaths. In practice, the resulting funerals may have been little different to many other funerals (e.g. of the poor, of the enslaved), and with time the distinctive features were rarely employed. If there was such a chronological change this may have reflected an increase in sentimental attachment to children and/or a realisation that

see David Konstan, 'Understanding Grief in Greece and Rome', *Classical World*, 110.1 (2016), pp. 3–30. Latin vocabulary distinguished between grief and mourning (words for the latter often suggesting bodily performance such as lament and striking the body), though the terms could be used together and sometimes interchangeably, see Valerie M. Hope, 'A Sense of Grief: The Role of the Senses in the Performance of Roman Mourning', in *Senses of Empire. Multisensory Approaches to Roman Culture*, ed. by E. Betts (London: Routledge, 2017a), pp. 86–103, n. 3. For the importance of public performance of correct mourning among the male elite (especially seen in consolation literature) and implied differences between grief and mourning, see, for example, Amanda Wilcox, 'Exemplary Grief: Gender and Virtue in Seneca's Consolations to Women', *Helios*, 33.1 (2006), pp. 73–105; Han Baltussen, 'Personal Grief and Public Mourning in Plutarch's "Consolation to his Wife"', *American Journal of Philology*, 130.1 (2009), pp. 67–98; Valerie M. Hope, 'Living without the Dead: Finding Solace in Ancient Rome', in *Coming Back to Life: The Permeability of Past and Present, Mortality and Immortality, Death and Life in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. by F. S. Tappenden and C. Daniel-Hughes (Montreal: McGill Scholarly, 2017), pp. 39–70.

⁶¹ See, for example, Randall Collins, 'Interaction Ritual Chains and Collective Effervescence', in *Collective Emotions*, ed. by C. von Scheve and M. Salmella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 299–311; Douglas J. Davies, *Death, Ritual, and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*, 3rd edn (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

perfunctory rites could add to the bitter pain of bereavement. Perhaps the ritual and sensorial contrasts with adult funerals (e.g. gloomy darkness, low attendance) and lack of public mourning, was thought (by some) to intensify grief.⁶² Yet memories of the features of the *funus acerbum* seem to have lingered, and alongside other aspects (e.g. regulations for length of mourning), continued to shape discussions of what was appropriate behaviour at the death of a child.

Roman society, then, to some degree, sought to rationalise via ritual the all too common loss of children, especially the youngest, but the intention was not to deny or prevent grief. The latter was a common experience, whereas fancy funerals and extended public mourning were optional extras that were not always deemed appropriate. The residues (if that's what they were) of the *funus acerbum* highlighted not an absence of grief and affection, but the real pain of parental loss and public-facing strategies which were intended to help. Indeed, in the very concept of a *mors acerba* lay consolation and an acceptance that it was natural for some people to die before their time. To be sure, dying before one's time was a matter of perception, and in many ways *acerbus*, when found in literature and epitaphs, reinforced the values of a patriarchal society, where it was more acceptable to mourn (if not to grieve) for male youths and adults than for babies. Yet *acerbus* also gave primacy to parental loss and suffering: it was a benchmark against which other losses could pale into insignificance or could only be justified by comparison with. *Acerbus*, whether applied to a death or a funeral, indicated that the loss of a child (regardless of age) was always special and likely heart-rending to the bereaved, even if this was not always openly expressed.

It could be argued that differences between grief and mourning may also explain differences in how *acerbus* was employed in literature and epitaphs. The epitaphs perhaps represented the recording of grief primarily by the non-elite, being informal statements of pain and loss for a wide age-range of dead children. By contrast, uses of *acerbus* in literature often served to justify expressions of public mourning by emphasising that an adult male's life had been cut short. However, such a dichotomy (epitaphs = grief; literature = mourning) is difficult to maintain, since epitaphs were also public statements bound by cultural, social, and economic demands, and thus a feature of mourning; and equally, mourning recorded in literature was underpinned by (and often powerfully evoked) the intensity of grief. Instead, it is more useful to note that emotions (and/or their performance) have a cultural and societal context that can involve evaluation and critique. William M. Reddy has argued that 'emotional regimes' may dictate which emotions and

⁶² For multi-sensory aspects of funeral rites, see Hope, 'A Sense of Grief'.

emotional expressions are normative and acceptable in a particular society.⁶³ Barbara H. Rosenwein has argued against the rigidity of overarching ‘emotional regimes’, suggesting instead a model of ‘emotional communities’ which may coexist within societies, with different modes of emotional expression that are expected, admired, or deplored.⁶⁴ For the Roman world, it is possible that a dominant ‘emotional regime’ may have been created and policed by the male elite, yet the emotional experiences and expectations of those outside this group may have been different and thus there were more likely separate (if overlapping) ‘emotional communities’. The different uses of *acerbus* (when related to death) between literature and epitaphs, as noted above, may perhaps be indicative of such distinct ‘emotional communities’, each with different, if intersecting concepts, as to what constituted a bitter and untimely death.

Factors such as wealth, gender, education, and age would have impacted the role and behaviours of bereaved persons (and potentially defined membership of an ‘emotional community’). Male elite authors did note differences in grief reactions (or arguably mourning, since these were publicly witnessed) often in a judgemental fashion, especially dismissing the demonstrative behaviours of women and the poor.⁶⁵ The personal and inner experience of the grief of another can never be fully accessible. However, people may still speculate about and analyse what is made public and, in doing so, often blur the boundaries between what is seen (mostly mourning) and the inner emotional world (grief). In ancient Rome, some individuals were judged for not stopping their grieving for their children while others were judged (and sometimes admired) for all too quickly curtailing mourning and resuming their previous life. Such extremes (and what lay in between) could be construed as positive and negative examples according to the agenda of the commentator, and the expectations of their own ‘emotional community’.⁶⁶ In turn, *acerbus* (when related to death in both epitaphs and literature) was often tied to evaluations and justifications; in any ‘emotional community’, *acerbus* was not a neutral term in identifying and understanding behaviours attached to premature deaths. This is not to

⁶³ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying About Emotions in History’, *American Historical Review*, 107.3 (2002), pp. 821–45; Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁶⁵ For example: Cic. *Tusc.* 3.27; Sen. *Ep.* 63.13; [Plut.] *Ad. Apol.* 113A.

⁶⁶ For examples and discussion, see Valerie M. Hope, ‘An Emperor’s Tears: The Significance of the Public Mourning of the Julio-Claudian Emperors’, *Thersites*, 9 (2019), pp. 117–46, and Valerie M. Hope, ‘Octavia: A Roman Mother in Mourning’, in *Maternal Conceptions in Classical Literature and Philosophy*, ed. by A. Sharrock and A. Keith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), pp. 270–95.

deny the bereaved their grief or dismiss heartfelt expressions as somehow formulaic or false, only to acknowledge that public expression had some inherent codes and expectations.

Roman parents likely did grieve intensely for their children, yet we cannot ignore funeral and mourning expectations that seem at odds with that grief or, alternatively, polarise Roman parents as good (they loved and grieved for all their children) or bad (they did not care when infants died). Such contrasts miss the point. Grief was not denied; disposing of a child (of any age) properly was never prohibited; children and infants were valued (although probably not all); and there is no evidence that anyone was ever punished for grieving for a child. More often, it was mourning not grief that was scrutinised. To be sure, to a modern reader, some of the strictures and comments about how to manage grief publicly (i.e. how to be a good mourner) may seem harsh, but there was also inherent acknowledgement that grief hurts and that getting on with life could be a tool for dealing with loss (and for some might be essential) and in this one's 'emotional community' could offer models as to how to channel grief into acceptable mourning. Common knowledge, laws, and traditions (even if ill-understood) implied that the deaths of young children were to be marked and mourned relatively simply and these held sway in some 'emotional communities' more than others, but probably intersected to some degree with them all.

Conclusion

The use of *acerbus* in relation to death was not precise or proscriptive. When linked specifically with words for death (*mors* and *funus*), it could serve as shorthand for 'untimely death', drawing on the metaphor of unripe fruits that fell from the tree or fruits that were harvested far too soon. However, the ways in which such a death was imagined as bitter were multiple in terms of its impact for the lost life and the bereaved and thus most notably the grief and tears of the living also became bitter, cruel, and painful. Defining what constituted an untimely death was subjective and any death could be judged as premature. In Latin literature, *acerbus* was thus tied to male elite values of social worth: a bitter death most often befell young men near or in their prime devastating their surviving parents, but sometimes the death of an older man, if aspects of his life and work were incomplete, was also a premature loss. In literature, the deaths of infants and young children who had yet to show their adult potential were rarely untimely or bitter. Similarly in epitaphs, the bitter tastes of death (prematurity, pain, and suffering both for the dead and the bereaved) were often associated with the loss of young men in their teens or early 20s, on the cusp of adulthood, who were commemorated by their parents. Yet epitaphs suggest that *acerbus* did, in general usage, have a more focused association with youth and thus not

with the deaths of older men, however distinguished. There may have been a literary conceit that any (male) death could be untimely, but the roots and force of such an analogy lay in the genuine pain of parental bereavement as witnessed on epitaphs. In these epitaphs, parents (mothers as well as fathers) did record their younger children, daughters, and some infants, and openly acknowledged loss. These differences between literature and epitaphs in the use of *acerbus* to some degree reflected different audiences and creators and perhaps the expectations of separate ‘emotional communities’. However, in all cases, describing a death as ‘bitter’ helped to justify mourning, and in the context of a particular death, whether for adult or child, that tears were understandable.

Whether the *funus acerbum* ever existed as a distinctive rite, and exactly who for, remains unclear, but there was a sense that the deaths of some children had once demanded, and could still demand, different treatment to adults. By the time of the production of the bulk of the surviving Latin literary and epigraphic output (broadly the first and second centuries CE), knowledge of certain aspects (such as night-time burial or the use of torches) were uncertain or confused memories perhaps, but may still have served to shape some of the debates, thoughts, and characterisation of childhood death, sitting alongside mourning legislation and hard-line comments about public behaviour. Not everyone agreed with or adhered to these traditions or perspectives and indeed, this was at least part of the reason why these opinions were sometimes expressed so starkly, but this does not mean that these expectations can necessarily be dismissed as completely out-of-date or the isolated views of an entirely separate elite male ‘emotional community’. Everyone likely lived with the knowledge of these perspectives on child death, with these views cross-cutting, if not dominating, different ‘emotional communities’, and thus everyone might have had to find ways of accommodating personal experiences of loss within such a framework.

To end, we can return to Puteoli. In 187 CE, perhaps more than two centuries after the undertakers’ regulations were published, an inscribed statue base recorded a decree of the town council to award a public funeral (including ten pounds of nard) and statues to a certain Gavia Marciana who was the daughter of a Puteolian decurion. The age at death was not given, but Marciana was described as a *puella* and her death as premature and bitter (*inmatura et acerba morte*).⁶⁷ Marciana was married, but likely childless, and probably still under *potestas*; she was on the brink of adulthood and had pre-deceased her father. In this case, a ‘bitter death’ did not result in a ‘bitter funeral’ (if the latter is understood as taking place rapidly and/or at

⁶⁷ *CIL* 10, 1784; Alison Cooley, *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 6–9. Rawson, ‘Express Route’, p. 275, suggests the inscription is an epitaph. Compare: *CIL* 10, 1208; *AE* 1910, 203.

night-time), since the death was highly honoured. However, those honours were awarded because the death was a 'bitter' loss for a wealthy and powerful family, who the town council publicly consoled. This inscription was primarily about official decrees, male office-holders (Marciana's father and husband), and the recording of mourning acts that were manipulated for familial prestige.⁶⁸ The use of *acerbus* here reflected many literary uses in the sense that it justified public mourning for a premature death of a young elite adult, albeit female. By contrast, not a single epitaph from Puteoli used the term *acerbus*. The grief of most parents who lost children was perhaps clear enough, with the associated funerals and mourning simple and appropriate, and requiring no explanation via the adjective *acerbus*. *Acerbus* was a word of loss and anguish but not one that was extensively used and thus its importance should not be overstated. Yet in some contexts, it held a certain power in explaining mourning, including against a backdrop of expectations that could sometimes serve to belie the extent of parental pain in public. The issue is not one of whether Roman parents cared when their children died, but how to understand the balance between, and the merging and separation of, grief and mourning, as presented in the surviving evidence. Mourning may never have been sweet, but it may not have entailed all the bitterness of grief.

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⁶⁸ See Emily Ann Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae. Women and Civic Life in the Roman West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 321–22; compare also Johan H. M. Strubbe, 'Epigrams and Consolation Decrees for Deceased Youths', *L'Antiquité classique*, 67 (1998), pp. 45–75.

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Chapter 7

Rethinking Depictions of Altars on Etruscan Mythological Sarcophagi

Valeria Riedemann

Introduction

Studies of myths in Etruscan funerary art have focused almost exclusively on tomb paintings and cinerary urns. In some cases, altar scenes appear on them showing depictions of violence, murder, and sacrifice. Why were violent scenes appealing to the Etruscans in their funerary art? Were pictorial altars used as a visual substitute for a sacrificial ritual for the dead? Although these questions are not new in Etruscan studies and have been extensively studied on, for example, ash urns, little attention has been paid to altar scenes depicted on sarcophagi.¹

The focus of this paper is on particular scenes that feature violence and death at or near the altar, and their complex relation to burial and funerary ritual in Etruscan culture.* Still, the role played by altar scenes in the Etruscans' imagined death at funerals has not been previously addressed. In this study, I assess which aspects of Etruscan culture might have determined the choice of a particular scene and whether these choices relate to social status and/or ritual norm. As for the interpretations of the scenes, many scholars have uncritically adopted the old conventions in use since the last century; that is, the stories depicted on Etruscan sarcophagi are depictions of Greek myth or even Greek tragedy. However, depictions of death and

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¹ Dirk Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer und Mord am Altar. Griechische Mythen in etruskischen Gräbern*, DAI Palilia 3 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1998). See also L. Bouke Van der Meer, *Myths and More: On Etruscan Stone Sarcophagi (c. 350–c. 200 B.C.)* (Louvain: Dudley, 2004); Francesco De Angelis, *Miti greci in tombe etrusche: Le urne cinerarie di Chiusi*, Monumenti antichi: Serie monografica 8 (Rome: Bretschneider, 2015).

events leading to death, sometimes around altars, may have been used as symbols of the deceased in their ‘imagined’ transition to the afterlife.

Images of myths on Etruscan sarcophagi functioned as a sophisticated form of visual communication within the funerary sphere. The images evoked the values and ideals of their patrons and users, most of whom had familiarity with stories derived from Greek myth, but also with Etruscanised versions of them.² Additionally, the sarcophagi also featured stories that were unique and found only on these ceremonial objects. In funerary art, these stories incorporate winged demons of death, such as Charu and Vanth, *hinthial* figures (i.e. the ghosts of dead heroes and heroines wearing bandages), or original juxtapositions of myths sometimes in ‘thematical symmetry’.³ The messages of these stories project different social and cultural expectations tied to their elite aristocratic contexts, such as encounters and tensions between family members played out as heroism, fate, violence, sacrifice, and redemption. In what follows, I examine the archaeological evidence (sarcophagi and altars) and the extent to which depictions of altars on Etruscan mythological sarcophagi were not only effective visual indicators of the violence of death by sacrifice but they are also powerful visual evidence of how the dead are victims of death in the imagination of the Etruscans.

² Jocelyn Penny Small, ‘The Etruscan View of Greek Art’, *Boreas*, 14/15 (1991/92), pp. 51–65; L. Bouke Van der Meer, *Interpretatio Etrusca: Greek Myths on Etruscan Mirrors* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1995); Alexandra Carpino, ‘Killing Klytaimnestra: Matricide Myths on Etruscan Bronze Mirrors’, *EtrSt*, 14.1 (2011), pp. 3–38; De Angelis, *Miti greci*; Larissa Bonfante and Judith Swaddling, *Etruscan Myths* (London: The British Museum Press, 2006), p. 8; Nancy Thomson De Grummond, *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History, and Legend* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 2006), pp. xi–xiv; Corinna Riva, *The Urbanization of Etruria: Funerary Practices and Social Change, 700–600 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 72–107.

³ For *hinthial* figures, see Jean-René Jannot, ‘Charun et Vanth, divinités plurelles’, in *Les Étrusques, les plus religieux des hommes: État de la recherche sur la religion étrusque. Actes du colloque international du Grand Palais (17–19 novembre 1992)*, ed. by D. Briquel and F. Gaultier (Paris: La documentation française, 1997), pp. 139–66; Jean-René Jannot, ‘Etruscans and the Afterworld’, *EtrStud*, 7 (2000), pp. 81–99; Ingrid Krauskopf, ‘The Grave and Beyond in Etruscan Religion’, in *The Religion of the Etruscans*, ed. by N. T. de Grummond and E. Simon (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), pp. 66–89. On ‘thematical symmetry on sarcophagi and engraved mirrors’, see L. Bouke Van der Meer, ‘Thematische Symmetrie in der etruskischen Kunst’, *BABesch*, 60 (1985), pp. 72–83, and Van der Meer, *Interpretatio Etrusca*, respectively.

Archaeological Evidence

The Etruscan mythological sarcophagi. Etruscan sarcophagi were body receptacles composed of a lid and a coffin made of wood or stone.⁴ They could feature painted or carved decoration, as well as inscriptions. Sarcophagi were expensive monuments, both in material and execution. They were commissioned and acquired by just a small part of the population to be placed either inside single-chamber or family tombs. In Etruria, the production of stone sarcophagi did not appear until the middle of the fourth century BCE, while the last exemplars date to about 200 BCE. The production of mythological sarcophagi was shorter, and it is almost exclusively observed during the second half of the fourth century BCE. After *c.* 300 BCE, mythological themes on sarcophagi are no longer seen. This shift in funerary iconography, also observed in other media, such as tomb and vase paintings, may have happened in connection with the final annexation of Etruria to Rome (298–264 BCE) and with Etruscan elites trying to find new visual languages of representation. However, a revival of myths on Etruscan funerary monuments does occur later on cinerary urns most commonly produced in northern Etruria during the third century BCE, a large number of them with depictions of altars. These were studied extensively by Dirk Steuernagel, who also includes a few sarcophagi in his assessments. It is likely that in the early decades of the third century BCE, southern Etruscan artists emigrated to the north introducing some of the myths – including altar scenes – observed in the sarcophagi, which appear on cinerary urns of later manufacture.⁵

⁴ For evidence of wooden sarcophagi, see Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, ‘The Evidence for Wooden Sarcophagi in Etruscan Tombs’, *EtrStud*, 10.1 (2007), pp. 141–51. To date, there are no surviving examples from Etruria, but two sarcophagi from the Black Sea region, one of them with panels depicting Greek divinities, provide a model of the type. See Nadia K. Zhizhina, ‘Wooden Sarcophagi with Plaster-Cast Appliques from Nymphaeum’, in *Northern Pontic Antiquities in the State Hermitage Museum*, ed. by J. Boardman, S. Solovyov, and G. Tsatskheladze (Leiden: Brill, 2001), figs 10.3–4.

⁵ Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer* (and personal communication). See also Adriano Maggiani, ‘Assassini all’altare. Per la storia di due schemi iconografici greci in Etruria’, *Prospettiva*, 100 (2000), pp. 9–16. A revival of myths on sarcophagi occurs, indeed, on Roman and Attic sarcophagi manufactured between the second and the early fourth centuries CE. See Paul Zanker and Bjorn C. Ewald, *Living with Myths: The Imagery of Roman Sarcophagi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). On the death of the mythological imagery on these monuments, see Mont Allen, *The Death of Myth on Roman Sarcophagi: Allegory and Visual Narrative in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Note the latter author’s observations on the decline and eventual replacement of mythological figures depicted on Roman sarcophagi for genres featuring no mythic content. It is somehow similar to the disappearance of

Etruscan altars and their pictorial evidence. Altars are ‘active’ instruments of cult rituals.⁶ In Etruria, they date from the seventh to the fourth centuries BCE and present diverse typologies, contexts, and functions.⁷ The most common types of altar consist of a solid block of stone in a rectangular shape (with a vertical or curved profile), round and stepped or terrace altars, and altars formed by the accumulation of stone blocks. Examples of the latter type – never found in funerary contexts – come from the sanctuary found in Pieve di Socana near Arezzo (fifth century BCE) and in the south area of the shrine of Pyrgi.⁸ In some cases, altars are decorated with outlined mouldings of different types, similar to those observed on sarcophagi, and with symmetrical grooves in semi-circular shapes (*gola etrusca*).⁹ An altar in Marzabotto and an altar outside the temple at Fiesole are good examples of the latter type (Figure 7.1).¹⁰ Relief decorations, on the other hand, are

mythological sarcophagi in Etruria; that is, in response to a crisis in the socio-political and religious systems.

⁶ For ‘active’ instruments and ‘passive’ indicators of cult rituals, see Aura Piccioni, *Culti domestici in Italia meridionale ed Etruria* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2020), pp. 151, 199–200.

⁷ Stephan Steingraber, ‘Überlegungen zu etruskischen Altären’, in *Miscellanea Archeologica Tobias Dohrn*, ed. by H. Blanck and S. Steingraber (Rome: Bretschneider, 1982), pp. 103–16; Silvia Menichelli, ‘Etruscan Altars from the 7th to the 4th Centuries B.C.: Typology, Function, Cult’, *EtrSt*, 12.1 (2009), pp. 99–129 (with catalogue on pp. 121–26); Silvia Menichelli, ‘Religione e ritualità: L’altare nel mondo etrusco. La disciplina etrusca al cospetto degli altari’, *Forma Urbis*, 14.10 (2009), pp. 24–35; Silvia Menichelli and Stephan Steingraber, ‘Etruscan Altars in Sanctuaries and Necropoleis of the Orientalizing, Archaic and Classical Periods’, in *Material Aspects of Etruscan Religion. Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Leiden, 29–30 May 2008*, ed. by L. B. van der Meer, *Bulletin Antike Beschaving Supplement 16* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 51–74; Silvia Menichelli, ‘Architettura sacra nell’Etruria rupestre. Il caso degli altari’, in *L’Etruria meridionale rupestre. Atti del convegno internazionale ‘L’Etruria rupestre dalla protostoria al medioevo. Insediamenti, necropoli, monumenti, confronti’*. *Barbarano Romano-Blera, 8–10 ottobre 2010*, ed. by S. Steingraber (Rome: Palombi, 2014), pp. 168–83. See also J. Euwe-Beaufort, ‘Altari etruschi’, *Babesch*, 60 (1985), pp. 100–05.

⁸ Jean-Paul Thuillier, ‘Autels d’Etrurie’, in *L’espace sacrificiel dans les civilisations méditerranéennes de l’antiquité. Actes du Colloque tenu a la Maison de l’Orient, Lyon, 4–7 juin 1988*, ed. by R. Etienne and L.-T. Le Dinahet (Paris: Boccard, 1991), p. 244. Giovanni Colonna, ‘Pyrgi’, *StEtr*, 54 (1988), pp. 369–70.

⁹ On mouldings observed on some Etruscan sarcophagi, see Ingrid E. M. Edlund-Berry, ‘Etruscan Mouldings and Tarquinian Sarcophagi’, *Mediterranea: Quaderni di archeologia etrusco-italica*, 11 (2014), pp. 34–36.

¹⁰ Friedhelm Prayon, ‘Architecture’, in *Etruscan Life and Afterlife: A Handbook of Etruscan Studies*, ed. by L. Bonfante (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1986), p. 198, fig. V-45 (Altar D).



Figure 7.1: Altar with symmetrical grooves in semi-circular shapes. Fiesole, sanctuary area, c. 300 BCE. Photo © Giacomo Mazzuoli, 2023.

extremely rare, with the only example coming from a funerary context and depicting an animal frieze.¹¹

The functions of altars in Etruria were diverse. They were used for the deposition of offerings or chthonic cults, in some cases associated with water or hero cults near wells or connected to channels that would take away the blood of the sacrificial victims.¹² In the Portonaccio temple at Veii, an altar is close to a well, while another altar is linked to the channel in the Pian di Civita at Tarquinia.¹³ Although the largest number

¹¹ Menichelli, 'Etruscan Altars from the 7th to the 4th Centuries B.C.', pp. 112–13, fig. 8 (altar of Grotta Porcina, Viterbo). More recently, Antonio Paolo Pernigotti, '(S)proporzioni etrusche: I monumenti funerari di Grotta Porcina', in *(S)Proporzioni: Taglia e scala tra testo e immagine*, ed. by P. Piacentini, G. Colzani, M. La Rosa, U. Mondini, and I. Sozzi (Milan: Ledizioni, 2021), pp. 33–51.

¹² For evidence of cult activity, offerings and species sacrificed, see Luigi Donati and Simona Rafanelli, 'Il sacrificio nel mondo etrusco', *ThesCRA*, 1 (2004), pp. 135–82, esp. pp. 175–77. See also Menichelli and Steingraber, 'Etruscan Altars', pp. 51–74.

¹³ Tarquinia: Maria Bonghi Jovino, 'Area sacra/complesso monumentale della Civita', in *Tarquinia Etrusca: Una nuova storia*, ed. by A. M. Moretti Sgubini (Rome: Bretschneider, 2001), pp. 21–29; Maria Bonghi Jovino, 'The Tarquinia Project: A Summary of 25 Years of Excavation', *AJA*, 114 (2010), pp. 168–71; Menichelli, 'Etruscan Altars from the 7th to the 4th Centuries B.C.', p. 113, fig. 9; Menichelli and Steingraber, 'Etruscan

of altars comes from sanctuaries, they are also found in domestic contexts and necropoleis.¹⁴ These altars were sometimes used for the sacrifice of animals, followed by a communal banquet where the consumption of meat worked as a fundamental socio-political practice that glued the community together.¹⁵ These collective rituals reinforced the identity of a community and, in the case of domestic contexts, the status of the family (*gens*) hosting the sacrifice. Alternatively, in funerary contexts, terrace-altars were placed outside *tumuli* and on top of cube-like tombs (*tomba a dado*) equipped with stair access. This combination of tomb and altar is observed on a black figure vase in Cerveteri (*Vaso dei Gobbi*), where two sacrificial processions end at a stepped monument, one of them a human sacrifice. In this regard, Friedhelm Prayon has suggested that these types of tombs can be considered a monumental form of altar.¹⁶ Those placed inside tombs as, for example, the altar in the Tomba Cima in San Giuliano, may have had the symbolic function of recreating domestic *sacraria*.¹⁷ Most importantly, an altar from Grotta Porcina near Norchia (sixth century BCE) is attached

Altars', p. 57, fig. 3. Portonaccio: Giovanni Colonna, 'Il santuario di Portonaccio a Veio. I: Gli scavi di Massimo Palottino nella zona dell'altare (1939–1940)', *MontAnt*, Serie Miscellanea 6 (2002), pp. 129–59; Piccioni, *Culti domestici*, pp. 60–61.

¹⁴ We may assume that the cult of Etruscan eponymous heroes (i.e. Tarchon, the founder of Tarquinia, or Corythus, the founder of Cortona) was also celebrated on altars. The closest material evidence to Etruria that we have today comes from Rome (the Lapis Niger linked to the *oikist* Romulus) and Lavinium. The latter site provides a unique example of a large number of altars grouped together in the Sanctuary of the Thirteen Altars, most likely linked to the cult of Aeneas. See Francesca Fulminante, 'Tumulo/heroon di Indiges/Enea a Lavinio (Pratica di Mare)', in *Roma, Romolo, Remo e la fondazione della città*, ed. by A. Carandini and R. Cappelli (Milan: Electra, 2000), pp. 213–14; Menichelli and Steingraber, 'Etruscan Altars', pp. 59–60.

¹⁵ M. Simonetti, 'Le arulae di Caulonia: Una presentazione preliminare', in *Kaulonia, Caulonia, Stilida (e oltre). I Contributi storici, archeologici e topografici*, ed. by Maria Cecilia Parra, Quaderni della scuola normale superiore di Pisa 17 and 18, 2 vols (Pisa: Scuola normale superiore di Pisa, 2001), 1, p. 337. For altars and *arulae* in domestic contexts, see Piccioni, *Culti domestici*, pp. 151–57.

¹⁶ Friedhelm Prayon, 'The Tomb as Altar', in *Material Aspects of Etruscan Religion: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Leiden, May 20 and 30, 2008*, ed. by L. B. Van der Meer, Bulletin Antike Beschaving Supplement 16 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 75–82. For example, the funerary altar attached to the Tumulo del Sodo II (sixth century BCE), Cortona. For the vase, see Marina Martelli, 'La ceramica etrusco-corinzia', in *La ceramica degli Etruschi. La pittura vascolare*, ed. by M. Martelli (Novara: Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1987), pp. 23–30, no. 85, who identifies the female victim as Polyxena, making the stepped structure the tomb of Achilles. Prayon, 'Tomb as Altar', p. 77, by contrast, suggests Iphigeneia as the victim.

¹⁷ Menichelli, 'Etruscan Altars from the 7th to the 4th Centuries B.C.', p. 110, fig. 5. Stephan Steingraber, 'The Cima Tumulus at San Giuliano: An Aristocratic Tomb and Monument for the Cult of the Ancestors of the Late Orientalizing Period', in *Votives*,

to a built structure, thus suggesting its use for some kind of performance, maybe in connection with the funerary games and rituals in honour of the deceased.¹⁸ I will return to this point later.

In Etruscan funerary art, altars are usually depicted as square platforms, sometimes decorated with mouldings and semi-circular grooves, as is often observed on altars depicted on cinerary urns. A bronze mirror in Berlin shows not only an altar with pattern decoration but also bears an inscription with the name of the deity to whom *Hercle*/Hercules (inscribed) sacrifices a goat: *Menruva* (*Menruva*/Minerva).¹⁹ By contrast, altars carved on sarcophagi show no ornamentation or inscriptions. Instead, they are key elements in that they imply that a sacrifice will take place, thus adding a dramatic element to the visual composition.

Etruscan Mythological Sarcophagi with Altar Iconographic Programmes

The 17 mythological sarcophagi that have come to us represent only a small fraction of the total production (11 per cent out of 148 exemplars) and they come exclusively from southern Etruria.²⁰ Their findspots were Tarquinia (8), Tuscania (6), Vulci (2), and Orvieto (1). Among these, only three exemplars from Tarquinia and one from Tuscania bear depictions of altars, sometimes on more than one side. Altar scenes were not a common iconographic choice, but rather an oddity. They appear on four sarcophagi: once on the so-called London Sarcophagus, three times on both the Sarcophagus of the Poet and on a sarcophagus from the Tomb of the Vipinana, and once on a sarcophagus from the Tomb of the Curunas II. Reinhard Herbig has suggested that, among others, it is likely that the first two sarcophagi, both from Tarquinia, were produced in the same workshop.²¹ If this is the case, we can imagine the compositions being

Places and Rituals in Etruscan Religion. Studies in Honor of Jean MacIntosh Turfa, ed. by M. Gleba and H. Becker (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 123–33.

¹⁸ Thuillier, 'Autels d'Etrurie', p. 245.

¹⁹ Berlin, Antikenmuseum; bronze mirror (c. 400 BCE); *ES*: 2.140; De Grummond, *Etruscan Myth*, pp. 180–82, fig. VIII.8.

²⁰ For the provenance and number of decorated stone sarcophagi, see Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, p. 4.

²¹ Reinhard Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*, Die antiken Sarkophagsreliefs 7 (Berlin: Mann, 1952), pp. 36–37, no. 63; pp. 43–44, no. 79; pp. 44–45, no. 80; Maria Donatella Gentili, 'Il sarcofago delle Danaidi al museo archeologico di Tuscania: cultura e valori morali di una matrona etrusca', in *Tuscania, l'Etrusca arx. Contributi alla conoscenza di Tuscania etrusca. Atti del V convegno sulla storia di Tuscania (22 marzo 2014)*, ed. by M. Tizi (Viterbo: Archeoares, 2016), p. 22.

perhaps created by the same artist, thereby explaining the choice of altar scenes carved on both of them.

[1] *The 'London Sarcophagus'*. This sarcophagus belonged to a member of the Curunas family in Tarquinia and it features reliefs on all four sides.²² One of the long sides shows an altar scene depicting a male figure pulling a nude female figure away from an altar (Figure 7.2). The upper torso of a male figure is visible behind the altar, while two male figures approach the altar from the right; one of them is nude with arms stretched to the back. In the middle of the frieze, a female winged figure stands in a relaxing pose. To her right, there are three groups: two males engaged in combat and an old man being led by a younger male. Further to the right, a female is seated on the ground with a male figure behind her. The figures are not inscribed.

Comparative iconography and literary sources have led scholars to see the juxtaposition of Trojan and Theban myths on this side of the sarcophagus.²³ While episodes of the 'Theban' saga are observed on the right side, 'Trojan' myths would predominate on the left side of the frieze with the altar scene. The other long side depicts a battle scene and the two short sides show a duel and the sacrifice of a female figure. Identifications of the figures in the altar scene on the long side include *Menle*/Menelaos threatening *Elinai*/Helen at an altar with *Aivas*/Ajax trying to restrain him to the left; to the right of the altar, the subject of the sacrifice of the Trojan prisoners. The latter, however, depicts only one prisoner being led to the altar without *Achle*/Achilles performing the sacrifice, as frequently observed in other versions of the subject.²⁴ The short sides would represent *Aivas*/Ajax facing *Uthuze*/Odysseus and the sacrifice of Iphigeneia or Polyxena. Finally, the 'Theban' episodes should be read from right to left: Iocasta dying;

²² London, BM, D21. Nenfro sarcophagus of hall type. *c.* 300 BCE (H 0.87 m × L 2.26 m × W 0.72 m). Tarquinia, Tomb of the Curunas (1831). *ET* Ta 1.196; *TLE* 732: [l]a/rθ. *čjrunas. velθurus / θany[vil]us. petrnialc. spural. marv / as.* Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*, no. 63; Ingrid Krauskopf, *Der thebanische Sagenkreis und andere griechische Sagen in der etruskischen Kunst* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1974), pp. 53–56; Otto Brendel, *Etruscan Art* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp. 385–86; L. Bouke Van der Meer, 'Tragédie et réalité: Programmes iconographiques des sarcophages étrusques', in *Spectacles sportifs et scéniques dans le monde Étrusco-Italique*, ed. by Équipe de recherches étrusco-italiques (Rome: École française de Rome, 1993), pp. 382, 392; Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer*, p. 190, no. 5; Adriano Maggiani, 'Appunti sulle magistrature etrusche', *StEtr.* 62 (1998), p. 134, no. 26; Francesco De Angelis, 'Tragedie familiari: miti greci nell'arte sepolcrale etrusca', in *Im Spiegel des Mythos: Bilderwelt und Lebenswelt*, ed. by F. De Angelis and S. Muth (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), pp. 60–61; figs 8–9; Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, pp. 46, 48–49; De Angelis, *Miti greci*, p. 207, fig. 33.

²³ Brendel, *Etruscan Art*, p. 385; Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, p. 46.

²⁴ See n. 27 below.



Figure 7.2: ‘London Sarcophagus’ (from Tarquinia). London, British Museum. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Oedipus, blinded, being led into exile; and the duel between the brothers *Evtucle*/Eteocles and *Pulnice*/Polynices.

There are, nonetheless, some problems with the identification of the scenes on this sarcophagus. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the figures have no inscription that would secure a certain identification. In Greek art, the episode with Helen seeking refuge at an altar shows her wearing a dress, while the episode with a nude female usually refers to Cassandra.²⁵ In the François Tomb (an Etruscan tomb in Vulci), a similar scene depicting *Aich*/Ajax and *Casntra*/Cassandra at the altar is inscribed. The scene is juxtaposed with the sacrifice of the Trojan prisoners and with the duel between *Evtucle*/Eteocles and *Pulnice*/Polynices, similar to the selection of scenes depicted on the sarcophagus.²⁶

²⁵ Toledo (OH), Museum of Art 67.154 Athenian red-figure bell krater attributed to the Persephone Painter (440–430 BCE). *CVA Toledo* 1, 28, pl. 43.1; Thomas H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), fig. 338; Deborah J. Lyons, *Gender and Immortality: Heroines in Ancient Greek Myth and Cult* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 40, fig. 2. For Cassandra, see depiction on an Athenian red-figure hydria by the Kleophrades Painter from Nola (c. 480 BCE) with Ajax dragging Cassandra (nude except for a cloak) away from a statue of Athena (Naples, MAN 81669); Carpenter, *Art and Myth*, fig. 335.

²⁶ Mauro Cristofani, ‘Ricerche sulle pitture della tomba François di Vulci. I fregi decorativi’, *Dialoghi di Archeologia*, 1 (1967), pp. 189–219; Filippo Coarelli, ‘Le pitture della tomba François a Vulci: una proposta di lettura’, *Dialoghi di Archeologia*, 3 (1983), pp. 43–69; Anna Maria Sgubini Moretti, *Eroi etruschi e miti greci: Gli affreschi della Tomba François tornano a Vulci* (Viterbo: Cooperativa Archrologia, 2004); De Grummond, *Etruscan Myth*, pp. 175–80, 197–99. For the inscription identifying the scene in the François Tomb, see Adriano Maggiani, ‘Eteocle nella tomba François’,

Moreover, the sacrifice of the ‘Trojan’ prisoners on the sarcophagus does not correlate with the episode in the *Iliad* (23.175–76) nor with other depictions of the subject in Etruscan funerary art. In these depictions, the figure of *Achle*/Achilles and sometimes a *hinhial Patruclē*/Patroclus appear together. The prisoners are in line with the one being sacrificed, who is seated naked on the ground, as seen on the François Tomb, the so-called ‘sarcophagus of the Priest’, and on the Sarcophagus from Torre San Severo.²⁷ An Apulian krater by the Darius Painter also shows the scene with Patroclus’ tomb (inscribed).²⁸ They all have unique designs but share a similar iconography, suggesting a particular Etrusco-Italic interest in the subject.²⁹ The altar scene depicted on [1] shows a female figure being seized by the hair while she grabs the male figure behind the altar with her left arm. However, the male figure does not look like a statue, and he is not *Achle*. In short, there are several iconographic elements on this particular scene depicted on this sarcophagus that are inconsistent with the variants found in other contemporary exemplars. In any case, we can say that the scene shows a dual function for the altar, both as a monument by which a woman seeks refuge and for the sacrifice of human victims. It is interesting, however, that the short side depicting the sacrifice of Iphigenia has no altar. This is in contrast to the same scene on the Sarcophagus of the Poet [2], leaving us wondering why the artist omitted such a key element in the story unless it depicts a different female sacrifice (Polyxena?).³⁰

[2] *The Sarcophagus of the Poet*. Among the sarcophagi with altar scenes, the Sarcophagus of the Poet stands out not only because of its three altar scenes but also because of its original iconographic programme, which shows

in *AEI MNEHΣTOΣ: Miscellanea di studi per Mauro Cristofani*, ed. by B. Adembri, 2 vols (Florence: Centro Di, 2005), II, pp. 599–610.

²⁷ Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*, nos. 121 and 73, respectively. See Adriano Maggiani, ‘Il sacrificio dei prigionieri troiani’, in *Artigianato artistico: L’Etruria settentrionale interna in età ellenistica*, ed. by A. Maggiani (Milan: Electa, 1985), pp. 208–12; Fausto Zevi, ‘Prigionieri Troiani’, *StMisc*, 30 (1996), pp. 115–27.

²⁸ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 91393 (H 3254). Apulian red-figure volute krater by the Darius Painter from Canosa. *RVAp* II 495, no. 18/30; Claude Pouzadoux, *Éloge d’un prince daunien: Mythes et images en Italie méridionale au IVe siècle av. J.-C.* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2013), pp. 115–29.

²⁹ Other examples of the subject appear on three painted ceramics: red-figure stamnos from Savona (*EVP* 88, pl. 20), red-figure calix-krater by the Turmuca Painter from Vulci (*EVP* 136, pl. 31), and on two engraved *cistae* from Praeneste (Paris, Louvre 1663 and London, BM 638).

³⁰ The London Sarcophagus is currently not on display. This short side of the sarcophagus is against the wall in the storage room and thus I was not able to photograph it when I was studying it a few years ago. For a visual record of this side, see Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*, no. 63, pl. 29d.

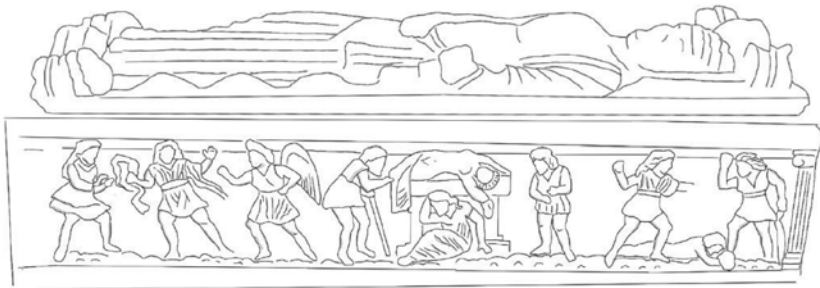


Figure 7.3: ‘Sarcophagus of the Poet’ (from Tarquinia). Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco. Photograph and outline by the author.

scenes of fratricide and matricide combined (Figure 7.3).³¹ Furthermore, on one of its long sides, this sarcophagus provides the only scene with a female

³¹ Rome, Vatican Museo Gregoriano Etrusco 14561 (74). Nefro sarcophagus of hall type, c. 300 BCE (H 0.62 m × L 2.19 m × W 0.63 m). Tarquinia (1833 or 1834). Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*, no. 79; Krauskopf, *Der thebanische Sagenkreis*, pp. 53–56; Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer*, p. 190, no. 69; *LIMC*, s.v. Orestes 58; Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, pp. 49–51; De Angelis, *Miti greci*, pp. 89–90, fig. 10.



Figure 7.4: ‘Sarcophagus of the Poet’ (detail). Clytemnestra’s death. Photograph by the author, 2015.

figure lying dead on an altar. Altar scenes also occur on the two short sides; one of them shows a male figure threatening an infant on an altar, while the other one shows a female being held by two male figures in front of an altar (Figures 7.5 and 7.6). The altar scenes on this sarcophagus have been identified as different moments of *Urste/Orestes*’ family and its tragic end. They are juxtaposed with the fatality of another family, namely that of Oedipus.

The Sarcophagus of the Poet provides another example of Trojan and Theban episodes combined. However, the scenes on the long sides of this sarcophagus seem to follow no logical order.³² One of the long sides should be read from right to left in the following sequence: *Urste/Orestes* and Pylades with Aegisthus lying dead on the ground, and then Clytemnestra’s death on an altar with Electra grieving below (Figure 7.4). The altar scene is flanked by *Urste/Orestes* to the right and a male figure with a walking stick to the left. Finally, one sees the flight of the hero harassed by the Furies.

³² See discussion below, ‘Visual Representations Informed by Epics and Tragedies’. On reading direction in Etruscan art, see Jocelyn Penny Small, ‘Left, Right, and Center: Direction in Etruscan Art’, *Opuscula Romana* 16.7 (1987), pp. 125–35.



Figures 7.5 and 7.6: ‘Sarcophagus of the Poet’ (from Tarquinia). Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco. Telephos and Infant Orestes (left) and the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (right). Photographs by the author, 2015.

These scenes were not uncommon in Etruscan art. Death and violence, in general, and the subject of matricide, in particular, have been studied by Alexandra Carpino, who contends some of the Etruscan paradigms of marriage and motherhood commonly accepted in current scholarship. Depictions of *Cluthumustha*/Clytemnestra on Etruscan mirrors, for example, focus on the moment before her murder, as opposed to depictions of her in funerary art, where a ‘double’ murder is observed, namely Aegisthus’ and hers.³³ Furthermore, a bronze mirror found in a tomb in northern Etruria depicts Telephos ready to kill a young Orestes with a sword, and both males have one leg kneeling on an altar. Different from the depiction on [2], the scene on this mirror includes more figures with *Cluthumustha*/Clytemnestra preventing *Achmemrum*/Agamemnon’s attack on Telephos.³⁴ She, therefore, saved the life of the son who will eventually kill her.

While, in general, the iconographic programme of this sarcophagus focuses on the tragic circumstances leading to violence and death of certain

³³ For depictions of Orestes and Clytemnestra on Etruscan mirrors, including matricide, see Carpino, ‘Killing Klytaimnestra’, esp. pp. 18–24, figs 6–7. See also Charlotte Scheffer, ‘Dangerous Driving: An Etruscan Motif Against the Greek and Roman Background’, *Opuscula Romana*, 28 (2003), p. 55. On violence and sacrifice in Etruscan funerary art, see Luca Cerchiali, Natacha Lubtchansky, and Claude Pouzadoux, ‘Du bon usage de la violence dans l’iconographie italote et étrusque’, in *Contacts et acculturations en Méditerranée Occidentale: Hommage à Michel Bats. Actes du colloque de Hyères, 15–18 septembre 2011*, ed. by R. Roure (Arles: Errance, 2015), pp. 309–19; Alexandra Carpino, ‘The “Taste” for Violence in Etruscan Art: Debunking the Myth’, in *A Companion to the Etruscans*, ed. by S. Bell and A. Carpino (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 410–30.

³⁴ Bern, Sammlung E. and Ph. Block-Diener. See Carpino, ‘Killing Klytaimnestra’, pp. 20–21, fig. 11.

family members, the altars depicted on this sarcophagus unquestionably add to the tension and dramatic effects of the scenes via ‘contained’ drama in the case of the short sides – unleashed in the depiction of nude *Cluthumustha*/Clytemnestra lying dead on the altar surrounded by her murderer son and grieving daughter. It is worth mentioning here that in cinerary urns of later manufacture, depictions of Aegisthus’ murder occur on altars. According to Adriano Maggiani, these iconographic divergences are derived from non-literary models. In other words, depictions of altars were used as a pictorial choice to emphasise the sacrificial aspect of a scene or the violent death of a victim.³⁵

[3] *The sarcophagus from the Tomb of the Vipinana*. This sarcophagus was found in the Tomb of the Vipinana in Tuscania and belonged to a woman named *Tanchvil*.³⁶ The scenes on this sarcophagus seem to be recounting different myths, but the meaning of their visual articulation remains illegible. Depictions of altars appear in the centre of the two long sides and on one of the short sides. In his discussion of this sarcophagus, Dirk Steuernagel is cautious about interpreting the scenes in the light of Greek myth or even tragedy.³⁷ For example, scholars frequently identify the scene on one of the long sides as the Danaids’ failed attempt to seek refuge at an altar after Aeschylus’ tragedy *The Suppliants* (Figure 7.7).³⁸ Although there is a supplication scene (*hikesia*) on the right side, where some have identified the Danaids’ father, Danaos, who is whispering to one of his daughters the plan to kill the suitors, the winged figures in the scene do not correlate with Greek myth or tragedy, thus suggesting an Etruscanised version of the myth or an entirely different story.

The other long side of this sarcophagus is even more difficult to decode. A first glimpse suggests some kind of sacrifice near an altar with male figures bearing offerings (Figure 7.8). While a nude female figure is sitting on a block to the left of the altar, a nude male figure sits on the ground

³⁵ Maggiani, ‘Assassini all’altare’, pp. 9–12. See also Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer*, pp. 119–24.

³⁶ Tuscania, Museo Archeologico 15531. Nefro sarcophagus of hall type, 310–300 BCE (H 0.83 m × L 2.28 m × W 0.70 m). Tuscania, Carcarello Necropolis, Tomb of the Vipinana (1839). *ET*, Giovanni Colonna, ‘Archeologia dell’età romantica in Etruria: I Campanari di Toscanella e la Tomba dei Vipinana’, *StEtr*, 46 (1978), pp. 81–117. 107 J14: [eca]θanyx[ilus]/ naxuxiua [-]. Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*, no. 85; Van der Meer, ‘Tragédie et réalité’, pp. 382–89, 392; Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer*, p. 190, no. 7; Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, pp. 54–57; Gentili, ‘Il sarcofago delle Danaidi’, pp. 21–31, figs 2–5.

³⁷ Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer*, pp. 28–29, 47–50.

³⁸ Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*; Van der Meer, *Myths and More*; Gentili, ‘Il sarcofago delle Danaidi’, pp. 22–23.



Figure 7.7: Sarcophagus of *Tanchvil* (Tomb of the Vipinana). Tuscania, MAN. Danaids (?). Photograph: © Mario Tizi, 2023.



Figure 7.8: Sarcophagus of *Tanchvil* (Tomb of the Vipinana). Tuscania, MAN. Etruscan Ritual/Sacrifice. Photograph: © Mario Tizi, 2023.

to the right. His raised left arm with his hand touching the corner of the altar suggests that he is seeking some kind of refuge or divine intervention. Although the scene does not include winged figures, a nude female and a male figure are visible behind the altar. Two divergent interpretations have been proposed for reading this scene, one historical, the other based on myth. The former, proposed by Herbig, suggests the sacrifice of Celts at the Forum Boarium in Rome (228–216 BCE), which would make the scene a historical episode. This is something unusual on sarcophagi, but not in tomb painting as the ‘historical’ episode of the Vivenna brothers is juxtaposed to Trojan and Theban myths in the François Tomb.³⁹

Alternatively, after interpreting the figures behind the altar as Aphrodite and Ares who were worshipped at Thebes, Erika Simon suggests that the

³⁹ Sgubini Moretti, *Eroi etruschi e miti greci*; Annette Rathje, ‘Self-Representation and Identity-Creation by an Etruscan Family: The Use of the Past in the François in the Light of the Tomb at Vulci’, in *Attitudes Towards the Past in Antiquity Creating Identities*, ed. by B. Alroth and Ch. Scheffer, Stockholm Studies in Classical Archaeology 14 (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2014), pp. 55–65.

scene represents the *Epigonoï*, a Theban myth.⁴⁰ The seated man and the woman on the rock would correspond to Teiresias and his daughter Manto (Paus. 9.33.1–2). The two male figures carrying objects and the man grasping the hair of the sitting woman correspond with the actions performed before human sacrifices. However, the gestures of the gods may exclude the possibility of statues, similar to the figure behind the altar depicted on [1] and on a mirror from Perugia depicting the image of a numen, *flere* (inscribed), on or behind a well.⁴¹ Further, if a scene of sacrifice was intended, then why is there no depiction of winged death demons? The London Sarcophagus [1], the Sarcophagus of the Priest, and the Sarcophagus from Torre San Severo show evidence of this iconographic consistency whenever a human sacrifice is intended. The scene probably depicts a local myth lost to us or a sort of rite of passage at an altar or a well. Votive deposits inside wells show that the Etruscans considered them sacred monuments and we cannot discard the possibility that the altar in the ‘Epigonoï’ scene on [3] corresponds to a well or an altar with some kind of chthonic function, thus reinforcing the theory that a local myth is depicted on this sarcophagus.

The scenes on the short sides have been identified as the sacrifice of Iphigenia (Figure 7.9) and the duel between *Evtucle*/Eteocles and *Pulnice*/Polynices. In the former, a downhearted Iphigenia is seated on an altar while *Achmemrum*/Agamemnon sits, devastated, on the ground. The male figure in the middle (*Teriasals*/Teiresias?) would be the perpetrator of the sacrifice as he grasps Iphigenia, similar to the females about to die on the long sides of this sarcophagus. In a painting in the Tomb of Orcus II (Tarquinia), the two men also appear together, this time in the underworld: *Achmemrum* wears bandages as a symbol of his murder next to *hinthial Teriasals*.⁴²

[4] *The sarcophagus from Tomb of the Curunas II*. Reliefs on this sarcophagus from Tuscania appear only on one of its long sides and on one short side according to its positioning in the tomb against the wall in the corner, near the entrance.⁴³ An altar is depicted only at the centre of the long side upon

⁴⁰ *LIMC*, s.v. Ares/Laran, no. 15. See also, *LIMC*, s.v. Epigonoï 5.

⁴¹ *ES* 170. Other Etruscan mirrors depict the sons of Tyro at the mouth of a well, a motif that probably originated in southern Etruria, which is also observed on a cista from Praeneste. See Van der Meer, *Interpretatio Etrusca*, p. 175, fig. 83.

⁴² Jacques Heurgon, ‘D’Iphigénie à Troilos (notes sur la substitution des victimes de sacrifices sur des urnes de Chiusi)’, in *Studi di antichità in onore di G. Maetzke 2*, ed. by M. Marzi Costagli and L. Tamagno Perna (Rome: Bretschneider, 1984), pp. 317–20; Van der Meer, ‘Tragédie et réalité’; Chiara Pilo and Marco Giuman, ‘Greek Myth on Etruscan Urns from Perugia: The Sacrifice of Iphigenia’, *EtrSt*, 18.2 (2015), pp. 97–125.

⁴³ Tuscania, Museo Archeologico, 86902. Nefro sarcophagus of architectonic type,



Figure 7.9: Sarcophagus of *Tanchvil* (Tomb of the Vipinana). Tuscania, MAN. The sacrifice of Iphigeneia. Photograph by the author, 2015.

which two figures sit in opposite directions while witnessing combat scenes to the left and right, respectively (Figure 7.10). The short side shows a duel. It has been suggested that the scene could be an Amazonomachy.⁴⁴ However, there are no weapons, and the seated figures are not engaged in battle, but rather witnessing some kind of sporting competition or performance which expands to the short side with another duel. As for their body language, it is also possible that the figures sitting on the altar could be seeking refuge from the fight.

The Symbolism of Altars on Etruscan Sarcophagi

The extant archaeological evidence shows that depictions of altars were not a widespread phenomenon in Etruscan funerary art in the fourth

320–300 BCE (H 0.68 m × L 2.04 m × W 0.85 m). Tuscania, Madonna dell' Olivo Necropolis, Tomb of the Curunas II, b (1970). Anna Maria Sgubini Moretti, *Tuscania: Il museo archeologico* (Rome: Gazzetti, 1991), p. 58, fig. 66; Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer*, pp. 98–99, 216, no. 300 (275–250 BCE); Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, p. 37.

⁴⁴ Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, p. 37.



Figure 7.10: Sarcophagus from Tomb of the Curunas II. Tuscania, MAN. Amazonomachy (?). Photograph by the author, 2015.

century BCE. When they occur, representations of altars may allude to the sacrificial rites performed by the living because they were needed by the dead.⁴⁵ Assuming that the coffin was displayed during the funeral, scenes of myths – and particularly those with altar scenes depicted on them – suggest that some kind of funerary ritual took place. Altar scenes depicted on the sarcophagi may have worked as ritual sacrificial scenes with bloodshed needed by the dead in a symbolic, permanent form. Apart from the depiction of the prisoner being led to the altar on [1] and the scene with Telephos and infant Orestes on [3], all the other victims are female. The iconography of human sacrifice is also very distinctive: while female victims may sit or lie on an altar, male victims sit on the ground.⁴⁶ In this regard, some aspects of the symbolism of altars on the mythological sarcophagi deserve consideration here. Firstly, whether depictions of human sacrifices in Etruscan art had a real correspondence with reality or whether they should be understood as

⁴⁵ Giovanni Colonna, 'Il culto dei morti', in *Civiltà degli etruschi*, ed. by M. Cristofani (Milan: Electa, 1985), pp. 290–306; Erika Simon, 'Greek Myth in Etruscan Culture', in *The Etruscan World*, ed. by J. Macintosh-Turfa (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 495–512; Ingrid Krauskopf, 'Myth in Etruria', in *A Companion to the Etruscans*, ed. by S. Bell and A. Carpino (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 397–98. On Etruscan death and burial practices, see Alessandro Naso, 'Death and Burial', in *Etruscology*, ed. by A. Naso, 2 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 1, pp. 317–39, esp. pp. 331–33.

⁴⁶ On female victims, see Marco Giuman, *La dea, la vergine, il sangue. Archeologia di un culto femminile* (Milan: Longanesi, 1999).

symbolic representations of death and violence; secondly, the extent to which the scenes may have been ‘informed’ by epics or tragedies; finally, the possibility that these depictions not only communicate a violent death but also the extent to which the dead are themselves ‘victims of death’ in the imagination of the Etruscans.

Human sacrifices. As in many ancient religions, the Etruscans considered animal sacrifice a high form of offering to the gods and human sacrifice was the highest. Despite some evidence of infants being sacrificed in foundational rituals, it is still unclear whether adult human sacrifices were a common Etruscan practice. The archaeological evidence examined by Maria Bonghi Jovino and by Luigi Donati and Simona Rafanelli suggests that possible human sacrifices took place in various contexts, including a post-mortem one (e.g. in connection to a building in Pian di Civita).⁴⁷ However, apart from the visual evidence depicting human sacrifice, to date, there is no archaeological record proving that this type of funerary cult practice was ever carried out in Etruscan tombs or the necropoleis.

The myths depicted on Etruscan sarcophagi show us that some schemes and iconography were clearly inspired by Greek models, but Etruscan artists (or their patrons) also seemed to prefer to adapt and incorporate new subjects into their designs, thus making them uniquely their own.⁴⁸ As a result, scenes of human sacrifice on the sarcophagi are juxtaposed and grouped in the same frieze line with figures from different stories. This is commonly observed, for example, in sarcophagi that present Trojan and Theban myths combined [7–3] where a thematic unity is achieved through the underlying theme of human sacrifice (or murder in the case of the

⁴⁷ Bonghi Jovino, ‘Area sacra/complesso monumentale’, pp. 21–29; Donati and Rafanelli, ‘Il sacrificio’, pp. 136–39, 169–63. See also Nancy Thomson De Grummond, ‘Etruscan Human Sacrifice: The Case of Tarquinia’, in *Diversity of Sacrifice: Form and Function of Sacrificial Practices in the Ancient World and Beyond. IEMA Proceedings 5*, ed. by C. A. Murray, SUNY series (New York: State University of New York Press, 2016), pp. 145–68; Corinna Riva, ‘Urbanization and Foundation Rites: The Material Culture of Rituals at the Heart and the Margins of Etruscan Early Cities’, in *A Companion to the Etruscans*, ed. by S. Bell and A. Carpino (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 97–98; Massimiliano Di Fazio, ‘Nuove riflessioni su sacrifici umani e omicidi religiosi nel mondo etrusco’, in *Il sacrificio. Forme rituali, linguaggi e strutture sociali*, ed. by E. Lippolis, P. Vannicelli, and V. Parisi, Scienze dell’antichità 23.3 (Rome: Quasar, 2017), pp. 449–64.

⁴⁸ De Angelis’ concluding remarks (*Miti greci*, pp. 299–306) also address this problem and discuss the diversity of themes (i.e. war, family relationships, sacrifice) on Etruscan funerary monuments produced in the third and second centuries BCE, many of which tend to be ambiguous. On Etruscan artists and new representations of Greek myth, see Jocelyn Penny Small, ‘Etruscan Artists’, in *A Companion to the Etruscans*, ed. by S. Bell and A. Carpino (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 353–67, esp. pp. 359–62.

Sarcophagus of the Poet) indicated by the altars. Although the Etruscans seemed to have had no strict conventions when it came to representing a particular story or several episodes of myths, the problem of viewing and understanding these images is a modern one. Altars were a common material aspect of Etruscan religion and so were the sacrifices and the rites performed on them. Even if actual human sacrifices were unusual in Etruscan life, depictions of them in funerary art tell us that they were certainly important in the afterlife.

Visual representations informed by epics and tragedies. The scenes on some sarcophagi seem to be inspired by epic stories and tragedies, but these features have been rarely addressed other than for iconographic purposes. In contrast, the depiction of tragedies on other funerary monuments in pre-Roman Italy, such as Apulian red-figure vases, for example, have been carefully studied.⁴⁹ Orestes, a popular figure on Apulian red-figure vases, appears three times on Etruscan funerary monuments, and exclusively on Tarquinian sarcophagi. For example, on the Sarcophagus of the Poet [2], he is depicted as an infant about to be killed by Telephos on one of the short sides, while on the long side, he is part of Clytemnestra's death (Figures 7.4 and 7.5), where there is also a depiction of Orestes' subsequent flight from Argos to Delphi as he was being chased by the Furies. The latter scene is also observed on one of the long sides of the Sarcophagus of the Magnate, this time with the addition of Pylades to the group alongside a Centaureomachy (Figure 7.11).⁵⁰ Amazonomachies decorate the other long side and the two short sides of this sarcophagus. The selection of the heroes among these two mythical battles is peculiar and has no parallels outside

⁴⁹ Oliver Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interaction Between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century* (Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), pp. 43–46, specifically addresses the issue of tragic vase-paintings for funerals. For a nice attempt to match a scene of a sarcophagus (H118) with an episode in the *Iliad*, see L. Bouke Van der Meer, 'The Saving of Patroclus' Body on a Tarquinian Sarcophagus. An Etruscan Cyclic Representation', in *AEI MNEHSTOS: Miscellanea di Studi per Mauro Cristofani*, ed. by B. Adembri (Florence: Centro Di, 2005), pp. 651–55 (with critical discussion of J. N. A. Svoronos' ('Szenen aus der Ilias auf einem etruskischen Sarkophage', *JdI*, 1 (1886), pp. 205–10) interpretation of the *Iliad* scenes on sarcophagus H119).

⁵⁰ Tarquinia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (inv. RC 9873). Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*, no. 120; Sybille Haynes, *Etruscan Civilization: A Cultural History* (Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), p. 294, fig. 237; Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, p. 35, fig. 11. To date, there is no publication of this side of the sarcophagus (see Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage*, pl. 18b, for a detail showing Orestes and Pylades flanked by female winged demons). I am grateful to the visual artist Trent Shadbourne for drawing the complete rear side of the sarcophagus and the frieze in spite of the reflecting glass case in the museum.



Figure 7.11: Sarcophagus of the Magnate. Rear side with Orestes and Pylades, and a Centauromachy. Drawing by Trent Shadbourne, 2019.

of Etruria. By contrast, the depiction of Orestes on [2] represents different episodes of the hero's life. Firstly, as an infant about to be killed by Telephos on one of the short sides; next, on the long side, as an adult who committed murder and matricide and who then seeks redemption.

The 'Theban' scenes on the London Sarcophagus [1] have been read following the sequence of the events in the literary sources from right to left: Iocasta dying, Oedipus, blinded, being led into exile; and the duel between Eteocles and Polynices.⁵¹ However, the order of the scenes on the Sarcophagus of the Poet [2] is more complex. If seen in a linear direction, the three first scenes from left to right seem to follow the same sequence as on [1], but the two scenes on the right side follow no logical order. To solve this problem, L. Bouke Van der Meer has proposed a non-linear reading of the scenes from the centre to the right and left: Menoeceus on his way to commit sacrificial suicide to prevent the war, the duel between Eteocles and Polynices, Antigone in front of Creon, blinded Oedipus being led into exile, and Iocasta in the final scene.⁵²

⁵¹ Brendel, *Etruscan Art*, p. 385.

⁵² Eur. *Phoen.* 1014; 1090–92; 1302; Eur. *Phoen.* 1693, 1710. Van der Meer, *Myths and More*, p. 51.

Reading these scenes in light of the literary evidence seems informative. However, there was no requirement for entire tragedies by Euripides to be presented. Instead, what is shown on these sarcophagi could have been excerpts of tragedies based on popular stories that satisfied the requirements of a meaningful funeral. These dramatic stories were probably not written down but were transmitted orally. Thus, we have the explanation for some of the original variants, 'illogical' juxtapositions, and even unidentifiable stories.⁵³

Giovanni Colonna has presented evidence of actual theatrical structures near Arezzo and Cerveteri, including imitations of theatrical spaces in necropoleis at Tarquinia and Vulci, which are to a certain degree related to the tombs.⁵⁴ If these structures were used for some kind of theatrical performance, competitions, or other rites is difficult to say. In any case, some of the episodes represented on mythological sarcophagi strongly suggest the possibility that some kind of (tragic) performative play was performed in Etruria and probably translated into Etruscan.⁵⁵ This idea is further supported by the fact that male figures on the lids of sarcophagi may be wearing *kothoroi* and by the presence of comic and tragic terracotta masks in tombs during this period.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in a revision of the literary sources for theatrical performances in Etruria, Giovannangelo Camporeale has noted that such performances were essential to Etruscan religion and used in cult rituals, as indicated by a funerary inscription for *Arnth Trepu*, who was a *thanasa*, thus an actor.⁵⁷

Last but not least, Greek names were not used by the Etruscans. Some names may be similar, but many names are different, just as the stories themselves may have been quite different. In funerary contexts, name labels for legendary figures appear in tomb paintings, but never on sarcophagi. In

⁵³ On this problem, see Jocelyn Penny Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 6.

⁵⁴ At Tarquinia, the Luzi Tumulus has a stepped antechamber is part of the Cuccumela Tomb at Vulci. See Giovanni Colonna, 'Strutture teatraliformi in Etruria', in *Spectacles sportifs et scéniques dans le monde étrusco-italique*, ed. by J. P. Thuillier (Rome: École française de Rome, 1993), pp. 321–47, esp. 323–30, figs 2–3, pls 1–2.

⁵⁵ Van der Meer, 'Tragédie et réalité,' pp. 379–91, esp. 380–82.

⁵⁶ There is no direct evidence that *kothoroi* were a feature of stage costume during the performances of tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. In art representations, however, they do signify an actor or a theatrical scene. See J. Michael Walton, 'Actors, Chorus and Masks', in *The Art of Ancient Greek Theater*, ed. by M. L. Hart (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2010), p. 33.

⁵⁷ *ET Cl* 1.2552. Giovannangelo Camporeale, 'Il teatro etrusco secondo le fonti scritte: Spettacolo, ritualità, religione', in *Material Aspects of Etruscan Religion: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Leiden, May 29 and 30, 2008*, ed. by L. Bouke van der Meer, BABesch Annual Papers on Mediterranean Archaeology Supplement 16 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 155–64.

conclusion, if there were actual performances of the mythological themes in Etruria, they may have been quite unlike Greek tragedy. The use of the term ‘tragedy’ is therefore loaded with Greek overtones, which do not necessarily apply to the Etruscans.

Ritual norm/Etruscan death imagined. It has been maintained that Etruscan elites desired violent, sacrificial, and tragic scenes depicted on their funerary monuments, particularly during the second half of the fourth century BCE.⁵⁸ In studying mirrors, which sometimes served as funerary objects, Nancy Thomson De Grummond concluded that the representation of bloody scenes was something required to satisfy the dead in some way – a widely accepted interpretation.⁵⁹ There was a widespread belief in antiquity that blood was necessary to pacify the anger of the dead and to magically protect their souls against the dangers of the transition to the underworld.⁶⁰ In the François Tomb, for example, the scene of *Achle*/Achilles’ immolation of the Trojan prisoners before the tomb of Patroclus not only shows the ritual function of the sacrifice during the funeral but also numerous figures, both human and animal, whose blood drips out of their bodies. Furthermore, even though the colours that once decorated the carved figures of the sarcophagi have faded away, the violence of the scenes suggests that the victims were bleeding, a feature still visible in the representation of the death of Actaeon on, for example, the Amazon Sarcophagus in Florence. His wounded legs emphasise his victimisation while, at the same time, his blood provides the divine force needed by the dead.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See Cerchiali et al., ‘Du bon usage de la violence’, pp. 309–19; Carpino, ‘“Taste” for Violence’, pp. 410–30.

⁵⁹ Haynes, *Etruscan Civilization*, p. 294; De Grummond, *Etruscan Myth*, pp. 209–10; Larissa Bonfante, ‘Human Sacrifice: Etruscan Rituals for Death and for Life’, in *Interpretando l’Antico: Scritti di archeologia offerti a Maria Bonghi Jovino. Quaderni di Acme 142*, ed. by C. Chiaramonte, G. Bagnasco, and F. Chiesa (Milan: Università degli studi, 2012), pp. 67–82; Krauskopf, ‘Myth in Etruria’, pp. 401–02. For ritual aspects of the cult of the dead, see Giovannangelo Camporeale, ‘The Deified Deceased in Etruscan Culture’, in *New Perspectives on Etruria and Early Rome*, ed. by S. Bell and H. Nagy (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), pp. 220–38, esp. 232–37. For other rites and cults as depicted in Etruscan tomb-painting, see Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, ‘Ritus und Kultus. Taugliche Topoi zur Interpretation der etruskischen Grabmalerei?’, in *Kulte – Riten – religiöse Vorstellungen bei den Etruskern und ihr Verhältnis zu Politik und Gesellschaft*, ed. by P. Amann (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), pp. 273–81.

⁶⁰ For literary references, see Ingrid Krauskopf, ‘The Grave and Beyond in Etruscan Religion’, in *The Religion of the Etruscans*, ed. by N. T. de Grummond and E. Simon (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 80, n. 75.

⁶¹ Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 5811. On this sarcophagus, see the monographic study by Angelo Bottini and Elisabetta Setari, *Il Sarcofago delle Amazzoni*

Additionally, heroic battles and scenes of sacrifice must have satisfied a funerary purpose, giving a reason for the artist to depict blood and thus allowing the viewers to see it.⁶² For example, the iconographic programme of the so-called Sarcophagus of the Priest shows scenes of funerary sacrifice flanked by demons of death and Amazonomachies under a common underlying subject: the shedding of blood, which highlights the important role that blood played in Etruscan funerary art. Amazon battles depicted on this sarcophagus (and on several others) may have well been like the Phersu games (or later gladiatorial games), a subject which easily lends itself to the representation of wounded, bleeding bodies.⁶³ Similarly, the three mythological sarcophagi from Tuscania found in the Tomb of the Vipinana – one of them with three altar scenes [3] – show that at least for one generation, depictions of myths that focused on violence and death were something desirable in the family's tomb. Whether these had to do with appeasing the 'bloodthirsty' deceased or a warning against sacrilege against the gods or the family is not yet conclusive.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the combination of tragic myths – including depictions of sacrifice at the altar – with reclining banqueting figures on the lids of some of the sarcophagi seems contradictory. It is possible that the selection of the scenes had more to do with securing the dead with a good afterlife, thus providing consolation to the deceased person's family, and not so much with 'warnings' to the living or concealed 'political' statements for particular historical circumstances.⁶⁵

(Milan: Electa, 2007). On Actaeon, see P. Gregory Warden, 'The Blood of Animals: Predation and Transformation in Etruscan Funerary Representation', in *New Perspectives on Etruria and Early Rome*, ed. by S. Bell and H. Nagy (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), p. 203.

⁶² According to De Angelis, *Miti greci*, p. 181, these and other battles depicted on later funerary monuments (i.e. Celtomachies) are not related to historical events nor to the Romans, fulfilling an eschatological function.

⁶³ The Amazonomachy is the single most popular subject depicted on Etruscan sarcophagi. It is interesting, however, that the subject never appears on tomb painting. See Valeria Riedemann Lorca, 'Greek Myths Abroad: A Comparative, Iconographic Study of Their Funerary Uses in Ancient Italy', in *Greek Art in Motion: Studies in Honour of Sir John Boardman on the Occasion of His 90th Birthday*, ed. by R. Morais, D. Leão, and D. Rodríguez Pérez (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2019), p. 460, and Valeria Riedemann Lorca, 'Amazonomaquia y pintura funeraria: A propósito de dos sarcófagos etruscos de Tarquinia', *Revista Círculo Cromático*, 2 (2019), pp. 11–24; Valeria Riedemann Lorca, *Funerary Amazonomachies in Pre-Roman Italy. Tomb Contexts, Materiality, and Uses in Apulia and Etruria*, Warren Moon Series in Art and Archaeology (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, Forthcoming).

⁶⁴ Steuernagel, *Menschenopfer*, pp. 144–55; De Angelis, 'Tragedie familiari'; Krauskopf, 'Myth in Etruria', p. 401.

⁶⁵ For Classical authors finding comfort in such scenes, see Zanker and Ewald, *Living with Myths*, pp. 41, 110.

In other words, altar scenes on Etruscan mythological sarcophagi would perhaps be better understood if we see less of what is ‘Greek’ on them and more of what is originally Etruscan.

Conclusions

Altars on Etruscan mythological sarcophagi are a powerful visual element that adds to the dramatism of a story and the impact of a scene. In the real world, they are indexical evidence of the performance of ritual: they were channels to enter the sphere of the divine and monuments used to determine divine will and expiate portents, including those associated with the *ars fulgatoria*.⁶⁶ In funerary art – the ‘imagined’ world – depictions of altars convey a variety of complex and intertwined symbolisms. They were not mere decorative elements, but highly meaningful ones in that they allowed viewers to observe the highest form of offering to the gods: sacrifice inflicted upon human victims. Altar scenes may also be constructions of a more figurative visual language, communicating the violence of death and perhaps reinforcing the idea that the dead deposited in the sarcophagi were victims of the same fate in the imagination of the Etruscans without needing to reflect actual funerary practices.

More often than not, scholars seem to accept uncritically previous identifications of the myths/stories represented on Etruscan mythological sarcophagi. Given that no one figure has an inscription to identify them, it is best to keep an open mind. Still with us is the traditional approach that one could find a Greek myth wherever there are narratives represented, often gluing different literary texts together that would, in some way, illustrate the story (or parts of it). Although some interpretations of the scenes may seem to fit with Greek literary and visual models, the evidence analysed in this study suggests that such an emphasis may not be appropriate for the Etruscans. The altar scenes depicted on the sarcophagi discussed in this study testify to their key role as an element in the composition conveying ideas of violence and sacrifice inflicted upon human victims in connection to funerary beliefs and ritual norms. Regrettably, many aspects of the Etruscans’ intellectual constructions about death remain elusive and incomprehensible to modern mentalities.

⁶⁶ Seneca, *QN* 3.33; Pliny, *HN* 2.140.

Abbreviations of Collections of Primary Sources

- CVA* *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, ed. by C. G. Boulter and K. T. Luckner (Toledo, OH: Toledo Museum of Art, 1976)
- ES* *Etruskische Spiegel*, ed. by E. Gerhard, A. Klügmann, and G. Körte (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1795–1897)
- EVP* *Etruscan Vase Painting*, ed. by J. D. Beazley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947)
- LIMC* *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*
- RVAp* *The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia*, ed. by A. D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1978–82)
- TLE* = *Testimonia Linguae Etruscae*, ed. by M. Pallotino, 2nd edn (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1968)

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Chapter 8

Memory, Monumentality, and the Tomb of the Royal Steward

Matthew J. Suriano

One of the more tangible reminders of our own mortality is a monument to the dead.* A standing sepulchre, an epitaph engraved in stone, the dedicated landscape of a cemetery or necropolis, all speak to the living by memorialising the dead. In each, we see a material form of death imagined. A small assemblage of Iron Age funerary monuments in Jerusalem's Silwan Necropolis provides insight into how these factors were interrelated in the memorialisation of the dead in antiquity. This necropolis included four above-ground monolithic sepulchres, three of which bore funerary inscriptions. The most well known of these is the Royal Steward Inscription, an epigraphic artefact that is often compared with a tomb mentioned in the book of Isaiah. Recent studies of monumentality offer new ways of studying this inscription, its biblical parallels, and related tombs from the necropolis such as the so-called Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter.¹ The common denominator in all is an aspect of visibility that is historically rooted in the period of the late monarchy, but continues to this day.

The Silwan Necropolis is the name scholars use to describe an ancient cemetery located on the southern spur of Jerusalem's Mount of Olives, the area of the village of Silwan, that consisted of visible funerary architecture

* The origins of this essay go back to a paper I gave at Yale University for the conference 'Inscribing Death: Memorial and the Transmission of Text in the Ancient World' in February 2018. My thoughts on the subject were expanded further the next year when I gave the 2019 Asher Achinstein Lecture at Johns Hopkins University. Throughout, I benefitted from comments from Jacqueline Vayntrub, Kerry Sonia, Mark Lester, Jeremy Smoak, and Ellen Muehlenberg in New Haven, and Alice Mandell and Theodore Lewis in Baltimore. Any shortcomings in this essay, however, are the responsibility of the author.

¹ The tomb's name comes from Christian pilgrims, who related it to Solomon's Egyptian wife in 1 Kgs 3:1. In reality, the tomb dates to the late-eighth or seventh century BCE.

above ground.² Despite the urban overlay of modern Jerusalem, some of the architecture is still visible, particularly the above-ground standalone structure known as the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter (TPD). This tomb was one of at least four above-ground monoliths, though the others are currently hidden by more recent architectural developments. Just inside the neighbourhood and not far from the TPD is the monolithic sepulchre that once bore the Royal Steward Inscription, currently in the British Museum. Next to that former tomb is a second monolith. Both have modern structures constructed atop them, exposing only their façades and parts of their sidewalls. These above-ground tombs will be referred to in this study as Monolith-1 (the Tomb of the Royal Steward), Monolith-2 (the adjacent tomb), Monolith-3 (the TPD), and Monolith-4.³ In antiquity, these monolithic sepulchres were standalone structures. Three of the four had epitaphs carved into their façades, Monolith-4 being the one exception. The Royal Steward Inscription and an accompanying shorter inscription were both removed from Monolith-1 in 1871 and sold to the British Museum (Figure 8.7), although the inscriptions on Monolith-2 and Monolith-3 are still *in situ*. The state of these two inscriptions is very poor; one is almost completely destroyed except for a letter and a half, yet we know enough of their context to analyse how monumentality worked in combining writing, architecture, and space.

The monolithic sepulchres in the Silwan Necropolis are unparalleled in Judahite mortuary culture during the Iron Age. The funerary architecture carved out of the limestone bedrock of the Olivet Range consists of subterranean rock-cut tombs, often featuring richly decorated façades and above-ground monolithic sepulchres. We do not see anything like them in early Judaism until the late-Hellenistic period. In Judah, moreover, the tombs of the Silwan Necropolis are distinct for reasons beyond visibility. All of the tombs, above-ground monoliths and subterranean tombs alike, were built for individual or dual burials (probably couples). Unlike typical Judahite rock-cut and cave tombs, which were built to accommodate multiple generations of the dead through secondary burial practices, the tombs in Silwan were single-generation burial sites. One of the architectural features that typify Judahite rock-cut tombs, the repository, is absent in the tombs of the Silwan Necropolis.

² The necropolis consists of below-ground rock-cut tombs and above-ground monoliths, totalling at least 45 burial units. In several cases, the rock-cut tombs were marked with richly decorated façades that could be seen from a distance.

³ This numbering system is being used by the author in the research project at the University of Maryland, MMO:VAS ('Monoliths of the Mount of Olives: A Virtual Archaeological Study'). The project's objective is to reconstruct and analyse the contexts of the monolithic sepulchres.

Thus, there are two particular features of the monolithic sepulchres: the singular nature of the burial unit and their outward visibility. The visible attributes of the monoliths involve not only their architecture but also their inscriptions. The few other examples of Hebrew funerary inscriptions from this period are interior, found inside the respective tomb. A notable example is the small corpus of funerary inscriptions found inside Iron Age-II tombs at Khirbet el-Qôm.⁴ In the Silwan Necropolis, however, three of the monolithic sepulchres bore epitaphs that were inscribed on their façades, above the respective tomb's entrance. The funerary inscriptions were exterior and meant to be seen. The interrelationship of both aspects of the monoliths, their singularity and their visibility, can be understood through the concept of monumentality. Additionally, given the particularity of this monumentality, the placement of the monolithic sepulchres on the Olivet Range across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem's eastern ridge is also noteworthy. The visibility of the tombs, their spectatorship, must be analysed within contexts both spatial and historical.

The Silwan Necropolis

The tombs of the Silwan Necropolis have been surveyed and documented since the nineteenth century, yet more recent analysis of the tombs has been limited. This is due to the political status of East Jerusalem, which is occupied territory according to the United Nations. The necropolis is located in the village of Silwan, an area of East Jerusalem that has been acutely affected by the modern Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Earlier studies of the area, the explorations of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Westerners, provide important insight although their accounts are often marred with orientalist perspectives and unfavourable descriptions of the Arab village.⁵ Yet the images, maps, and descriptions produced through these efforts capture elements of the area prior to more recent political and

⁴ See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, Jimmy Jack M. Roberts, Choon-Leong Seow, and Richard E. Whitaker, *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 325–32. The other example is from Khirbet Beit Lei; refer to Alice Mandell and Jeremy D. Smoak, 'Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case', *JANER*, 16 (2016), pp. 192–245, and Kirsi Valkama, 'The Function of Inscriptions in Iron II Judean Burial Caves', in *Approaching the Dead: Studies on Mortuary Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. by A. K. de Hemmer Gudme and K. Valkama (Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2020), pp. 68–84.

⁵ See David Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1993), pp. 1–2, and Hershel Shanks, 'The Tombs of Silwan', *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 20.3 (1994), p. 3.

urban developments that have since made Silwan difficult to access (see Figure 8.1).

In the nineteenth century, Félicien de Saulcy, August Salzmann, Charles Wilson, Charles Clermont-Ganneau, and others published images of the Silwan tomb known as the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter (see Figures 8.2 and 8.3).⁶ Clermont-Ganneau also famously 'discovered' the Royal Steward's inscription along with the second shorter inscription, though both were long known to the local residents of Silwan.⁷ The French explorer purchased and removed the inscriptions in 1871, though a full translation would not be published for another 80 years.⁸ In the mid-twentieth century, the separate surveys of Nahman Avigad,⁹ Louis-Hugues Vincent and M.-A. Steve produced detailed architectural drawings of these tombs.¹⁰ Avigad was also the first to translate the Royal Steward's inscription, which

⁶ Although the TPD is depicted in paintings by Luigi Mayer in 1804 and David Roberts in 1839, the drawing produced by Félicien de Saulcy, *Narrative of a Journey Round the Dead Sea, and in the Bible Lands, in 1850 and 1851* (London: R. Bentley, 1854), p. 215 Image 2, was the first accurate depiction of the monolith. The structure can be seen in one of the earliest photographs of Jerusalem, although Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey's 1844 daguerreotype is inverted. August Salzmann's 1854 photographic study was the first to focus on the tomb. The monolith's dimensions were also published by de Saulcy, *Narrative of a Journey*, p. 216, as well as by Charles Wilson, *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1865), p. 65 Plate XXIV, 4–5, in his rough outline of the tomb. Ermete Pierotti, *Plates, Jerusalem Explored: Being a Description of the Ancient and Modern City, with Numerous Illustrations Consisting of Views, Ground Plans, and Sections*, trans. by T. G. Bonney, 2 vols (Cambridge: Clay, 1864), II, Plate LXI, Fig. 5, also produced an architectural drawing of the monolith's façade with scale, however the monolith's walls were incorrectly depicted as slanting. Detailed drawings of the structure's features were published in Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez, *History of Art in Sardinia, Judaea, Syria and Asia Minor*, trans. by I. Gonino, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1890), I, pp. 272–83. In all of these accounts, the interpretation of the monolith varies from tomb to altar or temple. For a brief history of the tomb's research, see Gabriel Barkay, 'The Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter – a Re-Assessment', in *City of David—Studies of Ancient Jerusalem*, ed. by Eyal Meiron (Jerusalem: Megalim, 2013), pp. 38–68, and Gabriel Barkay, 'Who Was Buried in the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter?', *Biblical Archaeological Review*, 39.1 (2013), pp. 41–45, 48–49.

⁷ Charles Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine During the Years 1873–1874* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1899), pp. 306–13.

⁸ Nahman Avigad, 'The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village', *Israel Exploration Journal*, 3.3 (1953), pp. 137–52.

⁹ Nahman Avigad, *Ancient Monuments in the Kidron Valley* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1954).

¹⁰ Louis-Hugues Vincent and M.-J. Steve, *Archéologie de la ville, Jérusalem de l'Ancien Testament: Recherches d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 3 vols (Paris: Gabalda, 1954–56), I.

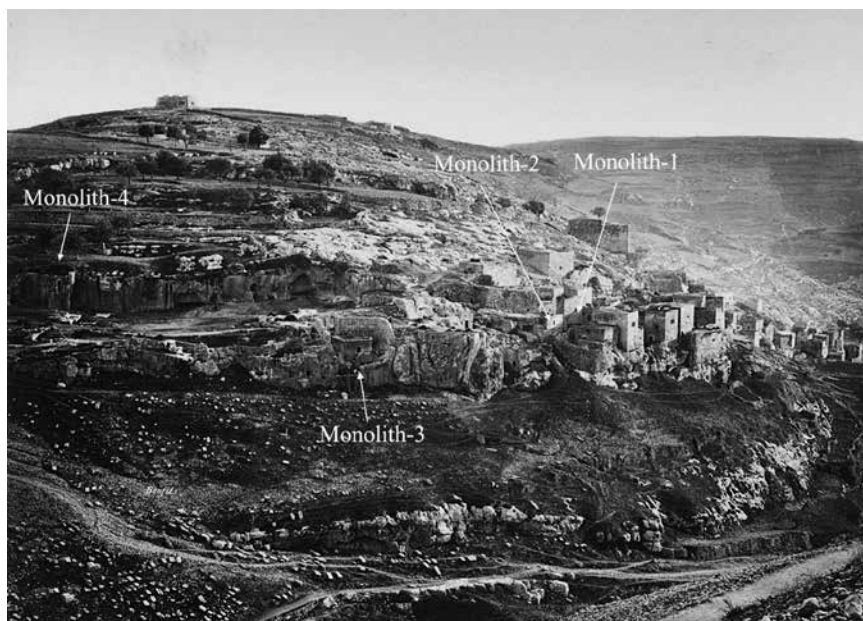


Figure 8.1: Photograph of Silwan by Félix Bonfils. All four monolithic sepulchres are visible in this photograph, taken in the 1880s. The Royal Steward Inscription was located below the point of the arrow that indicates Monolith-1. The photograph was taken over a decade after Clermont-Ganneau had the inscription removed and shipped to London. The markings are added by the author.

was initially unreadable during Clermont-Ganneau's time because scholars could not make sense of certain palaeographical features of the Hebrew text.¹¹ Avigad quickly tied the tomb and its inscription with Shebna, a royal steward criticised by the prophet Isaiah for building his own tomb (Isa 22:15–19).¹² In the years following the 1967 War, David Ussishkin surveyed Silwan, published new studies on the Royal Steward's Tomb along with associated sepulchres, and identified and documented additional places of burial.¹³ All of these studies captured the grandeur of the tombs, but in this

¹¹ Avigad, 'Epitaph of a Royal Steward', pp. 137–52.

¹² Avigad credits Yigael Yadin for the suggestion, but Clermont-Ganneau actually pondered the identification in his 1899 description of the artefact.

¹³ Ussishkin, *Village of Silwan*. Earlier in that decade, Stanislao Loffreda, 'Monolita di Siloe. Monumento incopiuto del period ellenistico-roman', *Liber Annuus*, 16 (1965–66), pp. 85–126, surveyed the tombs, though he misdated them to later periods.

phase of discovery and documentation, the necropolis' monumental nature during the Iron Age was never fully grasped.

A few scholars have touched upon the socio-historical significance of the Silwan Necropolis. For example, based on the absence of repositories, Baruch Halpern suggested that the single-burial purpose of the Silwan tombs pointed to a rupture in Judah's traditional lineage-based society during the late eighth through seventh centuries.¹⁴ Yet Halpern's thesis relies too heavily on a hypothesis of religious conflict in Jerusalem during the late Iron Age.¹⁵ More recently, Christopher B. Hays has argued that the prophetic rebuke of Shebna's tomb in the book of Isaiah is due to the Egyptianising features of the Silwan tombs.¹⁶ Hays accepts the identification of the Royal Steward's Tomb with that of Shebna in Isaiah and argues that the point of the critique is the fact that the tomb displays foreign influences. Hays' interpretation has its merits. It takes into consideration the influence of Egyptian funerary architecture, which is something that archaeologists have long pointed out in the Silwan tombs. But his explanation is monocausal. Hays isolates one feature and dismisses all other aspects of the Silwan Necropolis, such as the individual nature of the burial units. Moreover, his work is focused narrowly on the exegesis of Isaiah rather than examining the wider implications of the tombs during the late-Judahite monarchy.

In all of these studies, the visual design and space of the tombs are not fully accounted for. Halpern is correct in that the architecture of the tombs reflects an aspect of individuality, but his observations focus primarily on the internal features (lack of repository, richly decorated chambers, use of bathtub-like sarcophagi). These architectural features appear elsewhere in Judah and, in some cases, they may be earlier than the late eighth and

¹⁴ Baruch Halpern, 'Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century BCE: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability', in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, ed. by B. Halpern and D. W. Hobson (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), pp. 11–107.

¹⁵ Specifically, he relates the individuality of the Silwan tombs to the decline in ancestor worship as part of family religion. The concept of ancestor worship, however, is fraught. Archaeologically, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith has countered Halpern's thesis by arguing that many of the individual features that Halpern points to can be as early as the ninth and even the tenth centuries BCE. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, 'Life in Judah from the Perspective of the Dead', *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 65.2 (2002), pp. 120–30, citing Ussishkin, *Village of Silwan*. The monolithic sepulchres, however, are probably no earlier than the late phase of the eighth century based on the inscriptions that are found on three of the four monuments.

¹⁶ Christopher B. Hays, 'Re-Excavating Shebna's Tomb: A New Reading of Isa 22, 15–19 in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 122 (2010), pp. 558–75.

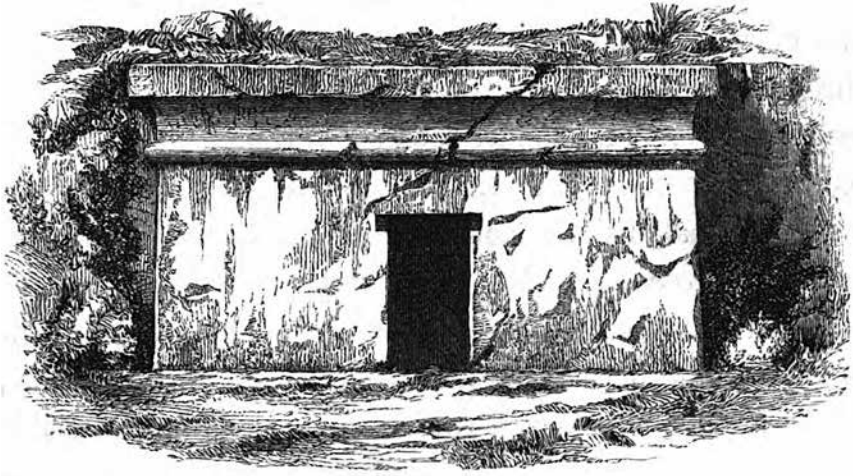


Figure 8.2: De Saulcy's drawing of Monolith-3, the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter. Louis Félicien Joseph Caignart de Saulcy, *Narrative of a Journey Round the Dead Sea, and in the Bible Lands, in 1850 and 1851* (London: Bentley, 1854), p. 215.

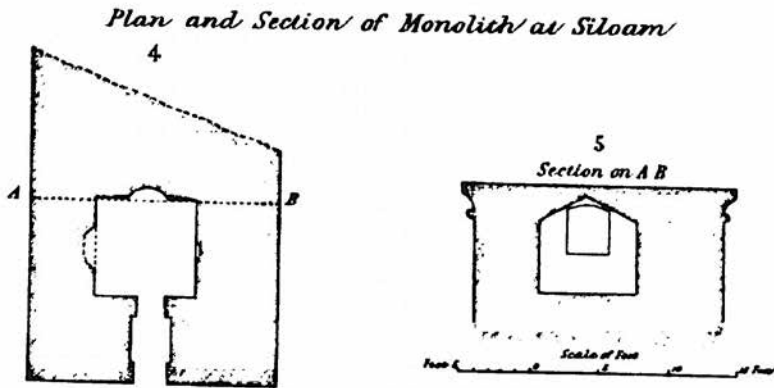


Figure 8.3: Wilson's drawing of Monolith-3, the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter. Charles Wilson, *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1865), p. 65, Plate XXIV, 4–5.

seventh centuries, the primary period of the necropolis.¹⁷ What sets the monolithic sepulchres apart is their exteriority. The distinctiveness of their design is evident not only in their internal aspects but also in the fact that

¹⁷ Bloch-Smith, 'Life in Judah', pp. 120–30.

they were large, obvious, above-ground burial units that were built in a place of high visibility. For Hays, the appearance of the tombs is solely an issue of foreign emulation; it was a problem of cultural particularity unrelated to any social developments in Jerusalem. Yet the significance of the Silwan tombs begins with their outward display, which is something that is historically unprecedented in Judahite mortuary culture. The exterior nature of the necropolis, specifically that of the monolithic sepulchres, must be understood in the context of their location. The Silwan Necropolis was situated across the Kidron Valley and in plain view of Jerusalem's political core: the City of David.

The internal design of the Silwan tombs is certainly significant. These were not multi-generational places of burial. Unlike the Judahite rock-cut bench tomb, they did not emulate domestic structures. The tombs of the Silwan Necropolis, both the monolithic sepulchres and the rock-cut tombs, were not built as communal burial sites to be reused over an extended period of time. The emphasis on the individual and the single-generation use of the tomb is tied directly to their monumentality. Unlike the typical Judahite bench-tombs, which were below ground and unobtrusive, the monolithic sepulchres stood above ground and were highly visible. They marked the local landscape and were meant to be seen. This visibility of the sepulchres also relates to their role within Jerusalem's society during the late Iron Age. With Halpern, we should see in these tombs a deliberate break with Judah's traditional kinship-based society. Just as the bench tomb served as an important symbol in the patrimonial structure of the Kingdom of Judah, where they marked family identity and inheritance, the sepulchres and related tombs in the Silwan Necropolis marked the status of an emerging elite class in Jerusalem during the late monarchy. The adoption of a style of tomb that bore Egyptianising elements was strategic and can be seen as an attempt to eschew traditional Judahite forms of burial, marking the prominence of the individual over and against the collective status of the family. By embracing cultural forms that were non-Judahite, Jerusalem's new elite attempted to build an identity that transcended the boundaries of the small southern Levantine kingdom. Likewise, in their ostentatious tombs this elite broke with tradition in order to claim an individual status that was not bound to Judahite kinship networks.

The Iron Age monolithic sepulchres on the Mount of Olives were monuments and their features can be termed monumental.¹⁸ A monument is something to which special meaning is assigned, within a specific

¹⁸ The distinction of terminology and the definitions that follow come from James F. Osborne, 'Monuments and Monumentality', in *Approaching Monumentality in Archaeology*, ed. by J. F. Osborne, The Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology Distinguished Monograph Series (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2014), pp. 3–4.

setting. This special meaning, or exceptional nature (at least, beyond the bounds of what is considered usual), is defined by local cultural practices and understood in light of social structure.¹⁹ Monumentality, on the other hand, refers to the various meanings groups attribute to the monument. In a recent study of monumental inscriptions in Jerusalem, focusing on the Royal Steward Inscription and the Siloam Tunnel Inscription, Jeremy D. Smoak and Alice Mandell identified five attributes that define monumentality: scale, space, spectatorship, graphic design, and materiality.²⁰ These attributes overlap and can be defined within different contexts. For instance, the monoliths' Egyptian features are important elements of graphic design that set the structures apart from other forms of funerary architecture in the area. Spectatorship applies both to the sepulchres' reception in antiquity as well as in modern times. Smoak and Mandell define 'materiality' with regards to the epigraphic remains of the Royal Steward Inscription, which was originally carved into the façade of one of the sepulchres: 'Materiality encompasses both a focus upon how writing or inscribing a material was a material act as well as the way in which written things became material artifacts after they were inscribed.' Their definition can be broadened in a way that accounts also for the scale, space, and design of the monoliths. This involves not just the physical transformation of an ideology, but also the agency involved in this transformation.²¹ The decision to construct large, elaborately decorated tomb architecture on the Mount of Olives, opposite the eastern ridge, was a deliberate strategy that sought to distinguish one place of burial from others. Each feature of the monolithic sepulchres, from the TPD to the Tomb of the Royal Steward, relates to a sense of monumentality. The monumentality of these tombs reveals the materialisation of an elite ideology particular to Jerusalem during the late-Judahite monarchy.

¹⁹ Compare Osborne, 'Monuments and Monumentality', p. 4, 'A monument, then, should be considered an object, or suite of objects, that possesses an agreed-upon special meaning to a community of people.'

²⁰ Jeremy D. Smoak and Alice Mandell, 'Texts in the City: Monumental Inscriptions in Jerusalem's Urban Landscape', in *Size Matters: Understanding Monumentality across Ancient Civilizations*, ed. by F. Buccellati et al. (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2019), pp. 310–11.

²¹ According to Elizabeth DeMarrais, Luis Jaime Castillo, and Timothy Earle, 'Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies', *Current Anthropology*, 37.1 (1996), p. 16, 'Materialization is the transformation of ideas, values, stories, myths, and the like, into a physical reality—a ceremonial event, a symbolic object, a monument, or a writing system.'

Monolith-3: The Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter

The TPD, the best preserved of the four existing monolithic sepulchres, serves as an apt example of the Silwan Necropolis' visible nature. Like the others, it is carved out of bedrock. The size of the structure is almost 6 m square, and it is estimated to have stood over 6 m in height with an elaborate roof, possibly one that was pyramidal (see Figure 8.4). The top of the existing structure shows signs that stone blocks were quarried from the roof in antiquity, which has led to the speculation that the tomb was once adorned with a pyramid.²² The monolithic sepulchre had a single entrance at the front, above which was a carved lintel that featured an inscription. In late antiquity, the entrance was raised in order to accommodate Christian monks who had converted the tomb into a residential structure.²³ As a result, the majority of the lintel was destroyed, leaving only the sides that overlapped the width of the original entrance. Clermont-Ganneau studied the entrance (see Figure 8.5) and noted that the lintel's remaining left side had signs of writing (Figure 8.6). The last letter of the inscription is intact (a *resh*) and next to it are the trace remains of the second-to-last letter. This penultimate letter was most likely also a *resh* and the two letters at the end of the inscription should be reconstructed as the word for 'curse' (*'rr*). This word is part of the common vocabulary in Hebrew funerary inscriptions, and in fact it occurs in two of the other three inscriptions from Silwan.²⁴ Thus, the last word of the inscription can be plausibly reconstructed.

The inscription's beginning is less clear, however. Clermont-Ganneau did not record any letters on the opposite side of the lintel, but in 1902 R. A. S. Macalister claimed that he could make out the remains of a *lamed* inscribed on the far right-hand side.²⁵ Today the right side of the lintel has been heavily damaged by fire, yet it is possible that this damage occurred after the time of Macalister's inspection. A *lamed*-preposition is an appropriate way to begin a tomb inscription, where it is typically affixed to a personal name. We see this in a roughly contemporary tomb at Kh. el-Qôm, near Hebron, which has two inscriptions that begin with this preposition.²⁶ In these inscriptions, the *lamed* marks the name of the dead. Both inscriptions belong to the same person and can be translated: 'Belonging to Ophay

²² Avigad, *Ancient Monuments*, pp. 19–23; Ussishkin, *Village of Silwan*, pp. 50–53.

²³ Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches*, pp. 315–16.

²⁴ The word *'rr* occurs in the tomb inscription from Khirbet Beit Lei and is found in later Jewish funerary writings. The term also occurs in the Royal Steward Inscription and is reconstructed in the inscription on Silwan Monolith-2.

²⁵ This reading has never been verified and David Ussishkin, who surveyed the tomb in the early 1970s, claimed that he could not detect any trace of the letter.

²⁶ See Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, pp. 325–26.

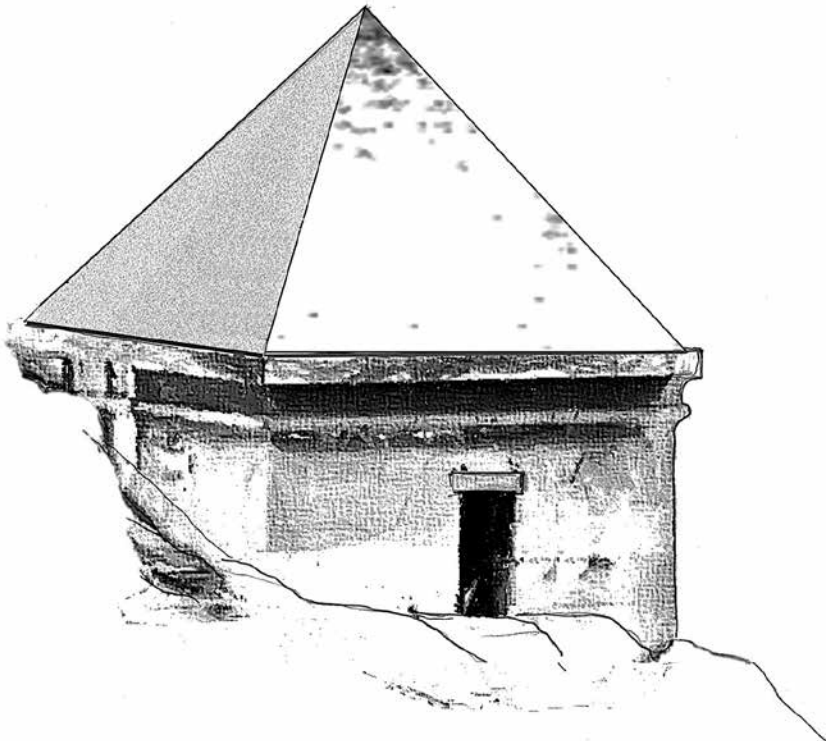


Figure 8.4: Reconstruction of the Monolith-3, the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter, with pyramidal roof. Image made by the author.

son of Netaniah this chamber' (*l'wpy.bn ntnyhw hhdr.hzh*). The inscription indicates to whom this particular burial chamber belonged. But the tomb inscriptions from Kh. el-Qôm differ from the destroyed epitaph on the TPD in that they mark the tomb's interior. Inscribed within a multi-chamber tomb, Ophay's epitaphs demarcate one branch within an extended family tomb. One of the tomb's three burial chambers belonged to Ophay and his offspring (presumably). The inscription on the TPD, on the other hand, was exterior. The epitaph here and the ones on the other Silwan sepulchres were inscribed on a lintel above the tomb's only entrance. The tomb's epitaph was displayed front-and-centre on its façade, written at eye level in big letters, highlighting the entrance. The single intact letter is a *resh* that is 2.8 cm in width and 12 cm in height (Figure 8.6). All signs indicate that the other letters were originally as large as this one.²⁷

²⁷ Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researchers*, p. 315.

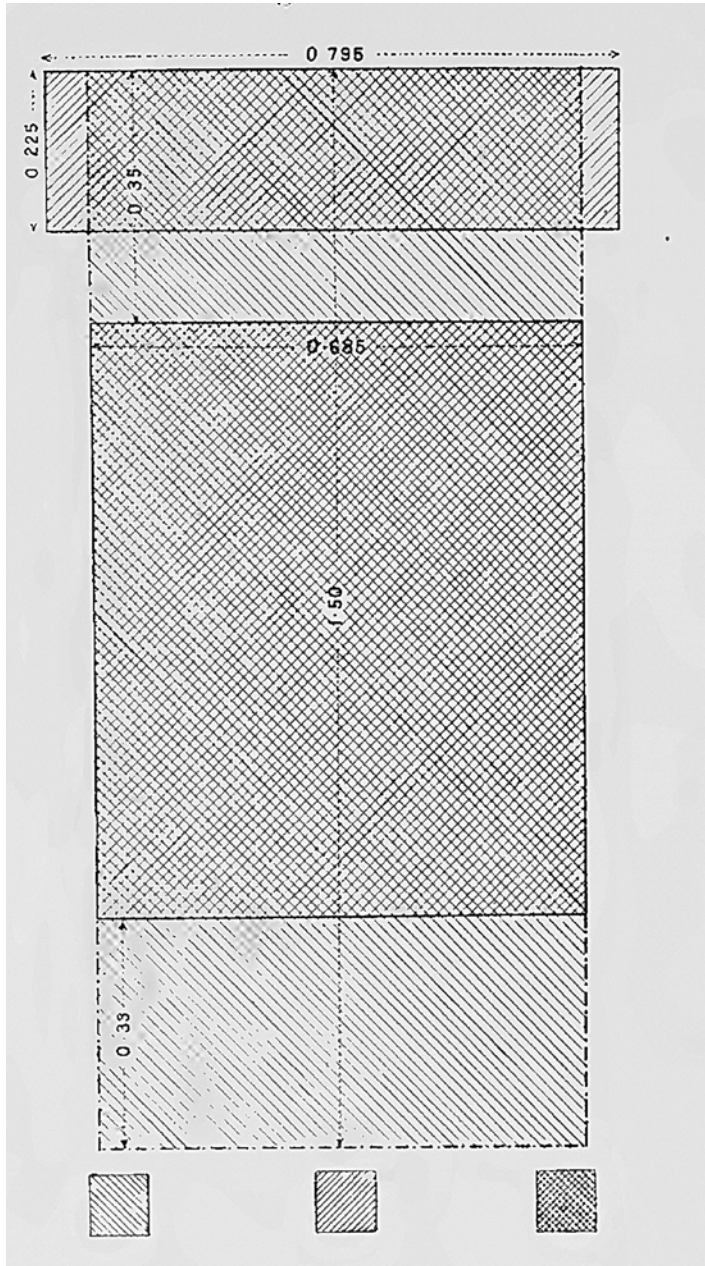


Figure 8.5: Clermont-Ganneau's study of Monolith-3's entrance, showing the extent of the lintel. Charles Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine During the Years 1873–1874* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1899), p. 314.

Figure 8.6: Drawing of the epigraphic remains on Monolith-3. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches*.



A.

Cartouche avec inscription.

Unlike the funerary inscriptions from Kh. el-Qôm and elsewhere in Judah, the writings on the monolithic sepulchres in the Silwan Necropolis were intended to be viewed publicly. Given that the tombs' architecture suggests that they were single-generation burial sites, it is reasonable to make certain assumptions regarding the otherwise destroyed epitaph on Monolith-3: specifically, the manner by which the monumental inscription identified the dead. Unlike the Kh. el-Qôm inscriptions, the epitaph on the TPD/Monolith-3 did not demarcate the space of one individual within a larger kinship collective; it declared ownership over the entire sepulchre.²⁸ Moreover, the single word reconstructed at the end ('cursed') warned against violating the burial space. It is possible to recognise in both the declaration of ownership and protective curses a delimitation of space in exterior funerary inscriptions that functioned differently from interior ones.²⁹ The prominence of Monolith-3 in early photographs of Silwan (Figure 8.3), before the growth of the modern village, provides a glimpse of what this space would have looked like in antiquity. The tomb commanded

²⁸ Although the inscription is fragmentary, the sepulchre together with its epitaph (though virtually unreadable) should be recognised as 'textual objects'. For this term, see Sarah E. Jackson, 'Writing as Material Technology: Orientation within Landscapes of the Classic Maya World', in *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, Surface and Medium*, ed. by R. Whitehouse and K. Piquette (London: Ubiquity, 2013), pp. 45–63.

²⁹ On space and materiality in funerary inscriptions inside tombs, see Mandell and Smoak, 'Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions', pp. 192–245.

its surrounding landscape and its presence would have been known to any passing through the valley.

Monolith-2 and Monolith-1: The Tomb of the Royal Steward

The public declaration of ownership seems to have been the primary purpose in all three of the main monumental inscriptions from Silwan, although they are articulated differently. Not far from Monolith-3 are the remains of two other monolithic sepulchres, constructed next to each other. Unlike Monolith-3, these tombs are surrounded by structures built in more recent times, and are hidden from sight outside the neighbourhood (see Figure 8.1). The sepulchres will be referred to here as Monolith-1 and Monolith-2,³⁰ but the first is better known by the artefact it once bore: the Royal Steward Inscription. There were, in fact, two inscriptions on this tomb when Clermont-Ganneau came across it,³¹ and both are currently in London (Figure 8.7). The inscription's modern name comes from the fact that it identifies the dead according to the royal title *šr l hbyt*: literally 'the one over the house', typically translated as 'Royal Steward'. Since Avigad, scholars have compared this tomb to the one mentioned in Isaiah 22, a tomb belonging to Shebna the Royal Steward, even though the personal name on the inscription from Monolith-1 is unreadable due to a lacuna, and despite the fact that the name's existing letters on the inscription do not compare with any spelling of the biblical figure's name. Regardless of these issues, a comparison of Shebna's tomb in Isaiah with the Silwan monoliths can still offer insight into monumentality and death in Jerusalem.

In Isa 22:16, the prophetic critique begins thus: 'What have you here? Who are your relatives here, that you have hewn a tomb for yourself here?' The prophet continues: 'He [Shebna] hews his tomb on high and engraves a residence for himself in the rock.' The object of Isaiah's criticism is a tomb that is visible. It is cut from bedrock in an elevated and public place, one that the prophet can even point to in his rebuke. Setting aside the historical questions that accompany the Shebna/Isaiah interpretation, Isaiah 22 seems to reflect a tradition associated with the Silwan Necropolis. The prophetic critique revolves around three interrelated issues that relate to monumentality: materiality, spectatorship, and space. Firstly, the individual nature of Shebna's place of burial in Jerusalem. It is a tomb that Shebna is constructing for himself rather than an established family tomb. Shebna's

³⁰ In Ussishkin's survey (*Village of Silwan*), these sepulchres were labelled Tombs 35 and 34.

³¹ Nahman Avigad, 'The Second Tomb-Inscription of the Royal Steward', *Israel Exploration Journal*, 5.3 (1955), pp. 163–66; and Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, pp. 403–06.

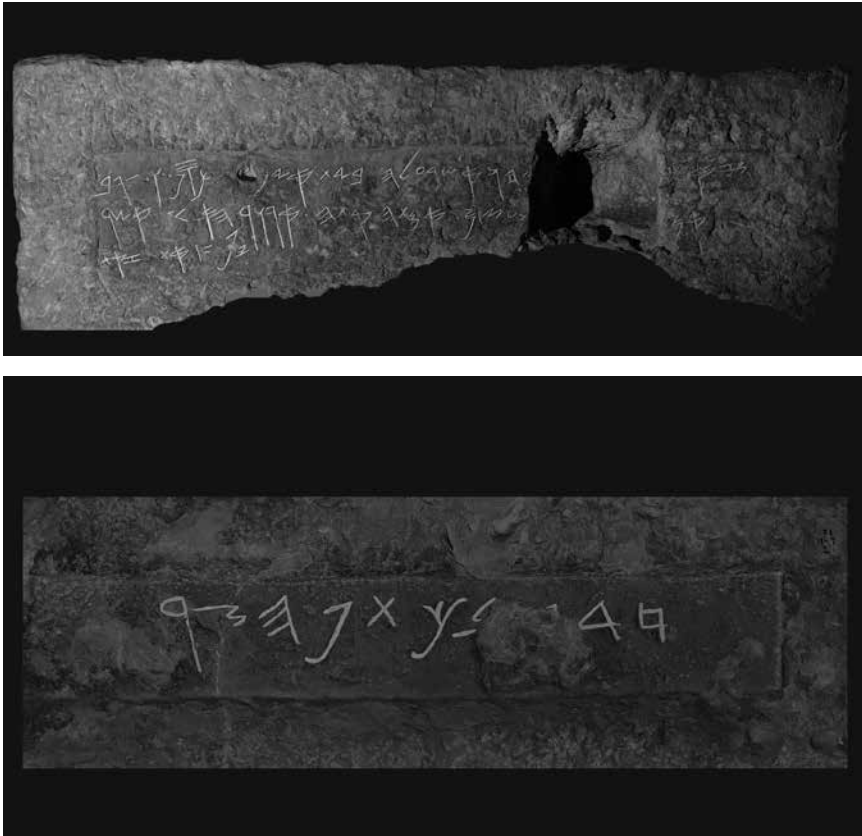


Figure 8.7: The inscriptions from Monolith-1. A. The Royal Steward inscription; B. The second shorter inscription. Images belong to the author.

actions, his agency in creating his own burial site while he was still alive, reflect an aspect of materiality tied to his aspiring status in Jerusalem's society. The second issue is the visibly ostentatious nature of Shebna's tomb, its spectatorship. Finally, space, Shebna's placement of his tomb in Jerusalem, which is openly challenged by Isaiah. These issues can be identified in the tombs of Silwan regardless of whether Monolith-1 belonged to Shebna. Again, the problem is that the Royal Steward's name is missing from the Monolith-1 inscription. Only the Yahwistic theophoric element remains. Avigad was the first to reconstruct the name Shebniah in an attempt to equate this individual with the Shebna mentioned in Isaiah 22. The problem is that the name of this person from the Hebrew Bible, who is also mentioned in the Book of Kings (see 2 Kgs 18:18), is never spelled with a theophoric element. Regardless, the questions regarding Shebna almost

serve as a distraction, as there are more important aspects of Monolith-1's inscription that need to be studied. The inscription reads:

1. This is [the sepulchre of PN-]yahu, the Royal Steward. There is nothing here, silver or gold,
2. [except] only his [bones] and the bon[cs] of his slave-wife [w]ith him. Cursed is whoever that
3. opens this!

The inscription actually mentions two individuals who were married, though unfortunately the name of the woman is not recorded. Surveys of the tomb indicates that it has bench-space for two people, and possibly a third bench (though the interior has been adapted for reuse over time).³²

The interment of the Royal Steward and his slave-wife, recorded in the tomb inscription, is an example of a single-generation burial. The tomb housed a man and woman, but no other family members; it was not a place of collective burial. The single-generation use of the tomb is evident from the inscription itself. The inscription begins with an opening formula that names the funerary monument: 'This is the sepulchre of [Personal Name].' The next part states that there is nothing inside of value except for the mortal remains of the couple. This is followed by a general curse against anyone who would violate the tomb, featuring the word 'rr ('cursed') that is plausibly reconstructed at the end of Monolith-3/TPD.

The first and third elements – that is, the opening declaration and the curse – are found also on Monolith-2 located next to the Royal Steward's Tomb. The inscription is worn and only a few words on the first and second line of the three-line inscription can be detected:

1. [This] is the sepulchre of Z-[...]
2. [... cursed is] whoever that o[pens this!]
3. ... [...]

The initial words are a formulaic arrangement that begins with the feminine singular demonstrative particle *z't* followed by a special term for 'tomb', *qbrh*, in construct with a personal name.³³ The syntax here bears important

³² Ussishkin, *Village of Silwan*, pp. 193, 200–01.

³³ Among Northwest Semitic inscriptions for the dead, the formulaic opening (demonstrative particle followed by a noun in construct with a personal name) finds its closest parallel in a group of Phoenician memorialising pillars from Umm al-Amud, Lebanon, which are dated to the Hellenistic period (Maurice Dunand and Raymond Duru, *Oumm el'Amed: Une ville de l'époque hellénistique aux échelles de Tyr* (Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient; Paris: Maisonneuve, 1962), pp. 181–190). In these inscriptions, the particle is attached to the noun; see e.g. *zmšbt b'lšmr* ('This is the

comparison with one of the most famous examples of single burial in the Hebrew Bible, that being Rachel's tomb.³⁴ In the biblical references to this burial place, the word used for tomb is the same as that encountered in the Silwan inscriptions, the otherwise rare term *qbrh*.³⁵ The word here is a feminine form of the common term *qeber*, but the word differs in more ways than simply its orthography. The term *q'bürāh* is used in the Hebrew Bible almost exclusively for single burials, rather than family tombs. For instance, *q'bürāh* is used in Deuteronomy for Moses's special burial on Mount Nebo. It is also used whenever a Judahite king is given an individual interment, separate from the royal tombs in the City of David, with a notable example being Josiah who is buried 'in his own sepulchre' (*biqburātō*; 2 Kings 23:30). Likewise, Rachel. The matriarch, who is not buried in her husband's family's tomb outside of Hebron – the Cave of Machpelah – is instead given her own *q'bürāh*. The two main Silwan funerary inscriptions function similarly. The syntactical arrangement of the opening formula serves a deictic function: it names the object that it is inscribed upon. In this case the object is a large, above-ground funerary structure. For these reasons, I have chosen the translation 'sepulchre' rather than simply 'tomb'.

Importantly, in the two examples from Silwan and in the case of Rachel's tomb, the specialised vocabulary for tomb is used in construct with the name of the dead. The syntax marks the ownership of the tomb, a burial site that belonged to an individual and not a kinship group. The words inscribed upon the tomb together with its unique architectural form stress the singular sense of the monument. The monolithic sepulchres were particularised around individuals in a very public manner, situated within Jerusalem's eastern viewshed. As such, they should be seen as the materialisation of an elite ideology that emerged during the Iron III period (732/701–586/539 BCE), a time when the capital city of Jerusalem was expanding in both size and power.³⁶ Unlike the Judahite rock-cut bench tomb, the Silwan sepulchres are monuments to individuals rather than houses for collectives of ancestors. Standing above ground, the Silwan sepulchres conspicuously marked Jerusalem's landscape, unlike the typically unobtrusive, rock-cut caves that served as family tombs elsewhere in Jerusalem and Judah.

memorializing pillar of B'LSMR'); Matthew J. Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 209. Several studies have pointed to a similar syntax seen in Nabatean funerary inscriptions, which open with *dnh qbr'*, Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, pp. 403–04.

³⁴ Suriano, *A History of Death*, pp. 208–11.

³⁵ Both *q'bürāh* and the more common Hebrew *qeber* derive from the same root and are only morphologically distinguished with a feminine sufformative *h*, yet their literary context is distinct and suggests a separate nuance for *q'bürāh*.

³⁶ Halpern, 'Jerusalem and the Lineages', pp. 11–107.

This monumentality of the Silwan sepulchres can be further compared with notable examples of individual burial in the Hebrew Bible, again beginning with Rachel but also including Shebna. Rachel's burial place was a recognisable landmark.³⁷ It is also described as having external features that adorned the sepulchre – specifically a standing stone or pillar. Genesis 35:20 refers to this monument as the ‘pillar of the sepulchre of Rachel’ (*maššebet q^abūrat-rāḥēl*). Likewise, Isaiah's critique of Shebna's tomb is due to its conspicuous nature. The images that run throughout the passage in Isa 22:15–19 suggest a visible tomb that invites rebuke.³⁸ But this tomb is conspicuous for other reasons as well. The rhetoric of Isa 22:16 indicates that Shebna's efforts are inappropriate because they subvert traditional Judahite cultural practices. Shebna is forgoing his family tomb. ‘Who do you have here?’ Isaiah asks of this royal steward who is building his own individual tomb. Shebna is assuming for himself responsibilities that should be passed on to those who follow him – the filial duty of burying one's previous generation. This is the point of the Silwan sepulchres, which were monuments that did not serve any traditional trans-generational purpose in ancient Judah. The visible, monumental form of these burial structures should be seen as a power strategy. Cut from bedrock and above ground, the tomb had a real presence unlike typical Judahite tombs that were hidden below ground. The tomb's presence in the royal city, particularly on the Mount of Olives, marked the prestige of the dead interred inside. The space was exclusive, a necropolis reserved for only the most powerful in Jerusalem.

The sepulchres were textual objects;³⁹ their writings were public declarations. These funerary inscriptions not only bore the identity of the dead – their names; their social rank – but they also demarcated privileged space while simultaneously warning against violating that space. Here, space plays an important role in defining the monumentality of the sepulchres. Again, the spatiality defined through writing was exterior rather than interior as in the case of the family tomb at Khirbet el-Qôm (Tomb 1). The sepulchres were not family tombs, their importance was not drawn from a traditional powerbase of kinship affiliation, nor was it rooted in ancestral identities. The monumentality of the sepulchres replaced the need for family. The dynamics of an individual funerary monument differed from

³⁷ It was also a disputed landmark within different tribal traditions, Benjamin versus Judah; cf. 1 Sam 10:2 and Jer 31:15.

³⁸ Christopher B. Hays' theory ('Excavating Shebna's Tomb', p. 567) that *maššab* in Isa 22:19a, typically translated 'station', is related to *maššebet* (the term used for Absalom's 'monument' in 2 Sam 18:18) is intriguing, though speculative. It could be a poetic allusion, though it should not be translated 'funerary chapel'.

³⁹ See Jackson, 'Writing as Material Technology', pp. 45–63.

those of a family tomb. The typical Judahite family tomb's significance was not outwardly manifest as a subterranean, rock-cut burial unit. Its significance was reified with each visit by family members, either for funerals or rituals of veneration. A kinship-group would revisit the communal tomb whenever another family member required burial. Such activities were not necessarily required for a funerary monument built for an individual burial. The monolithic Tomb of the Royal Steward was visible and apparent to all in Jerusalem. It did not require regular visits or ritual activities to keep its memory active, though they could have occurred. The tomb's place would be remembered, and so too the dead interred inside.

By the seventh century, the basic social-unit in Jerusalem shifts from extended families to nuclear families, marking a change in Judah's traditional kinship-based society. The rise of individual funerary monuments should be seen as a feature of this change in Judahite society. The phenomenon of individual monuments in place of family tombs is also found in biblical traditions of post-mortem memorials. Absalom, before he dies, erects his own pillar (*maššebet*), known as the 'monument of Absalom' (*yād 'abšālôm*), because he has no son to do it for him (2 Sam 18:18). Likewise in Third Isaiah, the faithful eunuch who declares 'I am a dry tree' (56:3) is promised by Yahweh a 'monument and name (*yād wāšēm*) better than sons and daughters' (56:5). In both of these instances, personal circumstances lead to the creation of an individualised funerary monument. For the eunuch, the absence of family to care for his memory is replaced by divine support. But differences aside, each of these cases bear upon the Silwan sepulchres precisely because they ran against the grain of Judah's traditional kinship-based society. In the Silwan Necropolis, the sepulchres as individual monuments claimed an inheritance that differed from traditional Judahite patrimony. They did not mark ancestral territory. Instead, they staked out politically important space within the landscape of Judah's royal capital – Jerusalem.

Synthesis and Summary

The monolithic tombs of the Silwan Necropolis provide insight into how death was imaged by the living in ancient Jerusalem. The monumentality of Monolith-1 together with the words of its inscription reveal aspects of self-imagined immortality. Architecture of this scale would have been commissioned and built by a person for their own interment, an aspect that is attested in Isaiah's rebuke of Shebna's tomb. Rather than relying upon established family burial-sites, Jerusalem's elite went against the grain and built their own. The singular nature of the monolithic tombs, their visible form, and even their Egyptianising architectural features, set them apart from typical Judahite tombs. The monoliths were not family tombs in the

traditional Judahite sense. They were not communal burial-sites that were intended to serve future generations of a kinship group. The Royal Steward, whose name is lost in lacuna, does not bear a patronym. His father's name is not listed in the funerary epitaph. Instead he is identified by his royal title. The immortality he envisioned was the memorialisation of his status. Monolith-1, like the other monumental tombs in the Silwan Necropolis, were built to be ostentatious symbols of a ruling class in Jerusalem in the late Iron Age. Their architectural features were an attempt to shape the imagination of anyone who encountered the tomb.

The monolithic sepulchres in Silwan and Shebna's tomb in Isaiah bear aspects that distinguish their monumentality. These tombs were built to make statements, whether it regarded ownership of land, political status in the royal city, or the enduring memory of a high-ranking royal office. These statements can be recognised in their space, design, and materiality. Spectatorship also played a prominent role in the sepulchre's monumentality. Anyone who lived in or visited the eastern ridge, ancient Jerusalem's political core, would have viewed the monuments. In a culture where tombs were not outwardly visible, the monumental form of the Tomb of the Royal Steward conveyed his privileged status within Jerusalem's ruling class. But the Royal Steward's burial place, along with the other monoliths, were not just visible. They marked the viewscape in an important part of the city. The monolithic tombs' prominent position on the Mount of Olives, notably TPD, has proven to be one of the more enduring aspects of the tombs. Their exceptional nature, their architectural design, and the space they occupy on the Mount of Olives have attracted the attention of travellers, pilgrims, and scholars. Ultimately, the monumentality of the tombs outlasted their role in remembering the dead. The acts of veneration and commemoration that would have occurred at the tombs eventually ceased, the tombs themselves were emptied and robbed, no longer serving as places of burial. Even the names of the dead who were once interred within their confines are now lost and forgotten. Long after the monoliths ceased serving as burial places, they continued to mark Jerusalem's landscape. Some were adapted for new functions, serving as dwelling places. Others (Monolith-3/TPD) found new identities as travellers and pilgrims re-inscribed the landscape of the Holy City.

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Section III

The Beyond

Katherine E. Southwood and Karolina Sekita

In this section of the volume, we present three chapters that explore aspects of imagination and perception used to analyse and trace primary evidence from antiquity related to death. In particular, we focus on specific language and images that suggest a post-mortem existence. Cornelia Weber-Lehmann discusses evidence associated with the concept of the soul in sixth- and fifth-century BCE Etruscan paintings, where false doors appear. In contrast, Panayiotis Christoforou examines sensory perception in the rituals surrounding the death, mourning, and burial of Roman emperors. Christopher B. Hays takes a different – meta-critical – approach, contemplating the concept of the *afterlife* in scholarship, interpreted as part of an ongoing tradition of reception of the work of a famous scholar, Mitchell Dahood. Here, the *afterlife* is depersonalised, as it is the work itself that is reanimated through ongoing scholarly engagement and enquiry, long after the scholar has been an active part in its defence and clarification. All three chapters display a striking similarity to other sections of this volume; namely, the fragmentation and erosion of the idea of a robust separation between those who live and those who have died. Instead, what emerges most prominently is the importance of social issues, power structures, and politics (both communally and within scholarship itself), as well as the significance of the attempt to care for each other and for those who have died.

In Weber-Lehmann's chapter, the notion that whatever was placed in the grave must be interpreted as carrying meanings of eschatological ideas, especially of the journey to the underworld, is questioned and caution urged around the potential for the over-interpretation of grave goods in terms of their eschatological significance. There is an attempt to uncouple Greek mythological narrations about the concept of the afterlife from the late eighth and seventh centuries BCE from Etruscan ideas. Weber-Lehmann

highlights the importance of the iconography within Etruscan funerary paintings of Tarquinia, questioning what role painted doors might play in perceptions of death; she puts the significance of imagination front and centre in the investigation, arguing that

the painted doors were not intended to be placeholders or a suggestion for passages from one room to the other, but that they were intended as symbolic doors that would lead into a further space, an imaginary room.

Therefore, rather than being a personification of the person who had died, the space was designed to evoke the burial chamber for the soul once it had become separated from the human body. If this was the case, as Weber-Lehmann argues, then what is the significance of the paintings around false doors? Instead of immediately jumping to metaphorical significance and allusion, Weber-Lehmann suggests that their meaning may be hinted at through their connection to something rather more immediate, such as the funerary ritual. Consequently, drinking wine and sporting contests serve as equally weighted rites intended to ensure a good journey for the spirit or soul of the deceased into the space beyond the door.

This raises the question, in response to Weber-Lehmann's suggestions about false doors, as to whether the false door is intended to communicate a kind of continuation of the funerary ritual. One way to approach this question is through the vehicle of the paradox. False doors open to the viewer an imaginative space through hinting at a further space into which the spiritual part of the deceased goes. Paradoxically, however, false doors also bar the living from entrance, thus emphasising the closed and inaccessible nature of that space. Here, we return to the question of liminality, which has arisen in the discussion at the end of Sections I and II of this volume.

Perhaps one implication of Weber-Lehmann's discussion is that false doors, as described, could amplify the sense of liminality experienced in funerary rituals. The paradoxical combination of expanding the imagined space beyond the door, alongside the confrontational nature of the fact that there is a door that it is impossible to enter, itself could intensify a sense of the chaotic feeling of the simultaneous push-pull emotions that grief evokes. This also adds weight and significance to the occasion of the associated rituals. Furthermore, the hybridity of mythical creatures associated with the graves – as beings that are both fictional and understood as dangerous – enhances the atmosphere of liminality, as does the apotropaic function attributed to guardians of tombs, such as centaurs and sphinxes who 'seem to fix the observer with their eyes'. There may be some continuity here with the apotropaic function associated with the dogs in Bosnakis' discussion. In both cases, there is an invitation to the imagination, yet a repelling of any attempt to do anything more than imagine.

Christoforou focuses on the importance of sensory perception when considering ritual and its place in culture, politics, and society as exemplified through the deaths of Roman emperors in late antiquity. In continuity with Weber-Lehmann and others in this volume, Christoforou draws us towards the idea of liminality in relation to death. Here, sensory perception evokes the paradoxical vibrant fragility of life, a paradox of death that funerals highlight. What is interesting about Christoforou's research is his emphasis on the notably vivid depiction of funerals, with details relating to 'sound, smell, appearance, touch, and even taste'.

Christoforou progresses to highlight the animated nature of those participating in public funerary rites as they display spontaneous outpourings of grief. These cohorts provide a sense of communal participation in funeral rites, which mimic the transition from life to death. Upon reflection, Christoforou's research highlights the contrast between the dead body and the body politic. What is significant here is the way the death captures the public imagination and evokes narratives, regardless of their truth, that surround it. The commemoration of the emperor in the public process of mourning brings the people together in the act of collective participation. In many ways, therefore, ritualistic commemoration, as recorded, serves to concretise power by signalling the gravity of the shared sense of loss. As with other chapters in this volume the attempt to craft memory and narrative in the face of death highlights the ways that power is negotiated socially and politically.

Hays focuses on the power structures embedded within scholarship concerning the ongoing reception of Dahood's *Commentary on the Psalms*. Specifically, he focuses on the themes of death and afterlife in the Psalms and how Dahood engaged with them. Nowadays, it is not popular to discern any evidence for the belief in or perception of an afterlife in the evidence available through the Psalms in the Hebrew Bible. In contrast, Dahood championed the perspective that 'a deep and steady belief in resurrection and immortality permeates the Psalter', a view he developed after being considerably influenced by the Ugaritic material available at Ras Shamra. Hays demonstrates the difficulties associated with how Dahood's commentary introduces the view of the afterlife, with the primary challenge being that it is asserted rather than fully and carefully argued, as evidenced by an introductory section on 'Biblical Theology' that cites only a dozen passages. Hays also highlights Dahood's lack of attention to detail and analytical clarity, particularly regarding the term 'resurrection', given the complexity of historical developments surrounding the topic in New Testament material. The problems of retrospectively projecting the concept, with all its reception-historical associations, anachronistically onto earlier material, are numerous.

The problems raised by Hays highlight questions about power in the academy, specifically related to the ethics of scholarly debate. Why, despite

these glaring difficulties in Dahood's commentary, was his scholarship nevertheless received with welcome? Perhaps one rather difficult aspect of the answer lies in the role and authority that primary material with canonical status asserts over other types of primary material. As Hays suggests, the issue may be the 'determination to see Jewish and Christian afterlife beliefs as superior to and incomparable with those of their contexts'.

Hays is right to suggest the need for a more accurate assessment of what the afterlife is in the Psalms. The research reflected in the chapter invites us to reflect on how we engage with the work of other scholars and how self-aware we are when it comes to power, privilege, and, importantly, to how we engage with primary material. Furthermore, Hays is correct to assert that imagination cannot be excluded from the interpretation of ancient data because whether we possess self-awareness around the fact that we use imagination or not, it is impossible to exclude imagination entirely. We noted this in our discussion of Hope's chapter in Section II, where even something as seemingly straightforward as metaphor requires from interpreters the imaginative leap to perceive one concept through another. Therefore, as Hays implores, it is necessary to train our imaginations so that our perceptions are as real and plausible as possible.

Chapter 9

Where Does the Soul Go? Some Thoughts on Etruscan Afterlife

Cornelia Weber-Lehmann

Although we have no written evidence from the Etruscans themselves about their belief in the afterlife¹ and therefore must rely on the evaluation of their material legacies, the question of the beyond seems to have found a unanimous solution. This is evidenced especially by the recent and abundant publications dealing with the problems of Etruscan funerary culture and its various aspects, mainly the voyage to the underworld. Meanwhile, the ‘*communis opinio*’ had created so much detailed and excessive discourse that it seems almost impossible to get ‘back to the roots’, i.e. to the sources – be they of literary or material nature. Especially, interpretation and discussion of archaeological remains seems to become more and more random.²

The most popular opinion is based on the assumption that after death the deceased must embark on a long journey to the underworld across the ocean in a boat, sometimes also by land on foot or in a cart. This way is full of dangers, which the deceased have to overcome before, in the end, they arrive to the Isle(s) of the Blessed, or to the Elysian Fields, where they can

¹ In this article, I will not be responding to the few written sources from late antiquity (for a discussion on these sources, see Ingrid Krauskopf, ‘The Grave and Beyond’, in *The Religion of the Etruscans*, ed. by N. Thomson de Grummond and E. Simon (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 66; Dorothea Steiner, *Jenseitsreise und Unterwelt bei den Etruskern. Untersuchung zur Ikonographie und Bedeutung* (Munich: Utz, 2003), p. 15; Giovanni Colonna, ‘Laldilà degli etruschi: Caratteri generali’, in *Il viaggio oltre la vita. Gli etruschi e laldilà tra capolavori e realtà virtuale*, ed. by G. Sassatelli and A. Russo Tagliente (Bologna: Bonomia University Press, 2014), p. 32; Alfonsina Russo Tagliente, ‘Laldilà in Italia meridionale tra greci ed etruschi’, in *Il viaggio oltre la vita. Gli etruschi e laldilà tra capolavori e realtà virtuale*, ed. by G. Sassatelli and A. Russo Tagliente (Bologna: Bonomia University Press, 2015), p. 91), as they may at the most reflect some very late beliefs and practices.

² For the various approaches to the interpretation of Etruscan funerary monuments, see Elisabetta Govi, ‘Il linguaggio figurativo delle Stele Felsinee’, in *Studi sulle stele etrusche di Bologna tra V e IV sec. a.C.*, ed. by E. Govi (Rome: Quasar, 2015), pp. 43–60.

enjoy an eternal life in happiness.³ However, this idea, if at all, can at best be applied to the earlier period of the seventh to fifth centuries BCE because from the later fifth and the fourth centuries BCE and onwards, the images occasionally show a different setting, corresponding rather to literary and figurative narrations of a Greek Hades.⁴

As a rule, passages from Homer (*Od.* 4.561–69; *Od.* 11) and Hesiod (*Erg.* 152–55; 166–73) are cited as a record of these conceptions, in which the Elysian Fields or the Isles of the Blessed, but also ‘dank’ Hades, are first mentioned in Greek literature.⁵ One main difference between all these ideas is that Elysium can also be located within an underworld, while the Isles of the Blessed always seem to remain on the surface of the earth, which is also reflected by several attempts in antiquity to identify them with real islands within the Atlantic Ocean.⁶ However, it is a matter of fact that the Homeric epics make contradictory statements about the afterlife,⁷ that in

³ Mario Torelli, *Il rango, il rito e l'immagine. Alle origini della rappresentazione storica romana* (Milan: Electa, 1997), pp. 142–43; Mario Torelli, ‘Ideologia e paesaggi della morte in Etruria tra arcaismo ed età ellenistica’, in *Iconografia 2001: Studi sull'immagine. Atti del convegno (Padova, 30 maggio – 1° giugno 2001)*, ed. by I. Colpo, I. Favaretto, and F. Ghedini, Antenore Quaderni 1 (Rome: Quasar, 2001), pp. 45, 57; Giovanni Colonna, ‘Osservazioni sulla Tomba tarquiniese della nave’, in *Pittura etrusca. Problemi e prospettive. Atti del convegno 26/27 ottobre 2001*, ed. by A. Minetti (Siena: Protagon Editori Toscani, 2003), p. 75 with notes 43–44. Ambros Joseph Pfiffig, *Religio Etrusca* (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1975), p. 169, already mentions the contrast evoked by the early Greek sources. ‘Den Etruskern war das (gemeint ist der Hades) fremd, sie glaubten noch an eine Reise des Abgeschiedenen über das Weltmeer zu einer grünen Insel’; (‘This was alien to the Etruscans (i.e. Hades); they still believed in a journey of the departed across the world sea to a green island’); Friedhelm Prayon, *Die Etrusker, Jenseitsvorstellungen und Ahnenkult* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2006), pp. 59–61.

⁴ It is very symptomatic that, for example, Krauskopf, ‘The Grave and Beyond’, p. 67, begins her treatise with the Hellenistic representations and then moves backwards from there. See also Jean-René Jannot, ‘Etruscans and the Afterworld’, *Etruscan and Italic Studies*, 7 (2000), p. 88.

⁵ Pfiffig, *Religio Etrusca*, pp. 167–69; Colonna, ‘L’aldilà degli etruschi’, p. 30.

⁶ Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, ‘Die Reise zu den Inseln der Seligen von Hesiod bis Lukian’, in *Between the Worlds: Contexts, Sources, and Analogues of Scandinavian Otherworld Journeys*, ed. by M. Egeler and W. Heizmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), p. 373.

⁷ Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, ‘Reading’ *Greek Death. To the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp. 10–107; Annalisa Tasso, *Pylai Aidaō. Un percorso iconografico sulla diffusione del tema delle porte dell’Ade da Oriente a Occidente*, BAR International Series 2524 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013), p. 12; Irmgard Männlein-Robert, ‘Vom Mythos zum Logos. Hadesfahrten und Jenseitsreisen bei den Griechen’, in *Unterwelten. Modelle und Transformationen*, ed. by J. Hamm and J. Robert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014), pp. 35–36; Kresimir Matijević, ‘The Evolution of the Afterlife in Archaic Greece’, in *Burial Rituals, Ideas of Afterlife and the Individual in the Hellenistic World and the Roman Empire*, ed. by K. Waldner, R. Gordon, and W. Spickermann,

Hesiod (*Erg.* 156–72) only the heroes of the Theban and Trojan Wars are to be transferred by the gods to the Isles of the Blessed and that, in *Odyssey* (*Od.* 4.561–69), only Menelaus – as the son-in-law of Zeus – receives the prophecy to live eternally in the Elysian Fields, but that the rest of humankind will die and go to Hades, expecting a shadowy existence in a gloomy underworld under the Earth.⁸

In addition, Odysseus, as well as Heracles (*Hom. Il.* 8.364–69; *Od.* 11.620–26) and Orpheus, are men who must go to the underworld for various reasons. The idea of a journey to the underworld and its topography is generally deduced from their adventures on the way to and into Hades. But all these men – when they reach the underworld – are still living persons who will certainly return to the world of the living, if only with divine help (*Il.* 8.362–69, *Od.* 11.623–26).⁹ That being said, their experiences are not applicable to every dead person's soul and are not even adept to explain the fate of the soul as a long and dangerous journey, be it across the ocean or by land. But if they are not even appropriate for all souls in ancient Greece, how can they become the basis for the interpretation of Etruscan funeral imagery?¹⁰ Greek mythological narrations may therefore serve at the most as a general hint for possible concepts about the otherworld from

Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 57 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2016), pp. 15–27, who gives a very detailed analysis of the ideas of the afterlife in the Homeric epics against the background of previous literature, concluding that the idea of an eternal existence as a shadow in a gloomy Hades is clearly predominating in early Greece. He considers the other concepts as exceptional cases, based on foreign – mainly Egyptian – ideas. For a good overview of the latter, see Martin A. Stadler, 'Elysische Gefilde und Orte der Schrecknisse. Die Fahrt des Sonnengottes durch die Unterwelt nach den altägyptischen Unterweltbüchern', in *Unterwelten. Modelle und Transformationen*, ed. by J. Hamm and J. Robert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014), pp. 7–29. See also Kresimir Matijević, *Ursprung und Charakter der homerischen Jenseitsvorstellungen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015), pp. 25–60; Männlein-Robert, 'Vom Mythos zum Logos', p. 35.

⁸ Hesiod, *Erg.* 166; Matijević, *Ursprung und Charakter*, pp. 25–29; Irmgard Männlein-Robert, 'Seelenreise und Katabasis: Literarische und philosophische Konturen einer Denkfigur', in *Seelenreise und Katabasis: Einblick ins Jenseits in antiker philosophischer Literatur. Akten der 21. Tagung der Karl und Gertrud Abel-Stiftung vom 30. Juli bis 1. August 2018 in Tübingen*, ed. by I. Männlein-Robert (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), p. 5.

⁹ See Carsten Colpe and Peter Habermehl, 'Jenseitsreise', in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. by E. Dassmann, 31 vols (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1995), xvii, p. 490, B. I–II.; for the Greek 'descensus' stories, pp. 506–15, 518; Männlein-Robert, 'Vom Mythos zum Logos', pp. 32–35, 47–50; see also Ioannis G. Kalogerakos, 'Seelenreisen und Raumvorstellungen der Frühzeit', in *Seelenreise und Katabasis: Einblicke ins Jenseits in antiker philosophischer Literatur. Akten der 21. Tagung der Karl und Gertrud Abel-Stiftung vom 30. Juli bis 1. August 2018 in Tübingen*, ed. by I. Männlein-Robert (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 20–26.

¹⁰ Kalogerakos, 'Seelenreisen und Raumvorstellungen', p. 27.

the late eighth and seventh centuries BCE in Greece and the Mediterranean onwards but should not be applied one to one as a general precondition for Etruscan beliefs.

There is another premise of recent literature I would like to question: the assumption that whatever was placed in the grave must be interpreted as carrying meanings of eschatological ideas, especially of the journey to the underworld.¹¹ Ceramics, vases, and bronze utensils with everyday motifs such as ships, fish, birds, or rams or very common motifs of orientalisising art such as lions, sphinxes, sirens gorgons, etc., should not be over-interpreted in a metaphorical sense as friendly companions or threatening monsters, respectively.¹²

In the title of my contribution, I use the word ‘soul’, which we normally use today when we want to express that a human being may be more than matter, a physical substance.¹³ Early Greek literature used the expressions *psyche*, *eidolon*, or *skia*, the latter ones indicating that this part of the dead kept the form or the aspect of the living person. Thus, for example, in Greek vase painting from the sixth century onwards, the *psyche* of warriors killed in battle was represented as a small black winged figure, sometimes escaping from the mouth of the dead, appearing fully armed as the warrior had fought.¹⁴ We do not have similar representations in Etruscan Art from this period, so we are not

¹¹ Colonna, ‘L’aldilà degli etruschi’, pp. 29–30; Chiara Pizzirani, ‘Il mare nell’immaginario funebre degli etruschi’, in *Il viaggio oltre la vita. Gli etruschi e l’aldilà tra capolavori e realtà virtuale*, ed. by G. Sassatelli and A. Russo Tagliente (Bologna: Bonomia University Press, 2015), pp. 71–79; critical edition: Sheramy D. Bundrick ‘Under the Tuscan Soil: Reuniting Attic Vases with an Etruscan Tomb’, in *Athenian Potters and Painters*, ed. by J. Oakley, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), III, pp. 11–12.

¹² Sourvinou-Inwood, ‘Reading’ *Greek Death*, pp. 45–47. The arguments she presents against the interpretation of ship models or representations of carts on grave goods in Minoan tombs as an indication of a journey to Elysium can equally be applied to Etruscan grave furniture. For other sources, see Colonna, ‘L’aldilà degli etruschi’, p. 30, and Torelli, ‘Ideologia e paesaggi della morte’, pp. 45–47, who compare the ‘corredi’ of the second half of the ninth century with the representations on Hellenistic urns from Volterra.

¹³ For the various meanings of the term ‘soul’, see Pfiffig, *Religio Etrusca*, pp. 13–14; 163; Egon Pfeifer, *Eidola: Und andere mit dem Sterben verbunden Flügelwesen in der attischen Vasenmalerei in spätarchaischer und klassischer Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989), p. 12; Lars Albinus, *The House of Hades. Studies in Ancient Greek Eschatology* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000), pp. 43–56, gives the most detailed and profound overview of scholarly discourse concerning the concept of the psyche since Homeric times.

¹⁴ Mainly in scenes of the Trojan War. See Karl Schefold and Luca Giuliani, *Götter- und Heldensagen in der spätarchaischen Kunst* (Munich: Hirmer, 1978), Figs 309, 312, 313, and 335; Pfeifer, *Eidola*, pp. 108–09; Bridget Martin, ‘Cold Comfort: Winged *Psychai* on

sure whether a comparable conception of the separation of body and soul of a dying person existed among the Etruscans at the same time. But considering the sumptuous tomb architecture and equipment of the graves, we may certainly assume that the Etruscans also always believed in an otherworld, where the non-physical part of the person would have a further existence.¹⁵ Obviously, the deceased were to be given a house, a dwelling for eternity. But this house was – first of all – a housing for the dead body. Is there any hint to a place – i.e. an idea of a beyond – where the *psyche* was thought to go?

Thinking about these very complex and frequently asked questions for which a wide range of different answers can be found in current literature, I would like to limit myself in the following chapter (mainly for methodological considerations) thus:

1. to one place and one region respectively, i.e. Tarquinia and southern Etruria;
2. to a strict chronological approach to archaic and early classical monuments and to literary sources from Greece, which already existed at that period; and
3. to consider only monuments that are or were part of the tomb itself and could not have found only a secondary purpose in the tomb.

Under these premises, I will look at two problem areas in particular: the phenomenon of the false door and the journey to the beyond as they appear in the figurative tradition of the sixth and earlier fifth centuries BCE. For this approach, I will focus on the Etruscan funerary paintings of Tarquinia, which, because of their rich and colourful iconography, have since their discovery up to now repeatedly given rise to wide-ranging interpretations of Etruscan afterlife concepts and funerary rites, often without considering the further context of a single motive or its chronological standing. In any case, it can be assumed that the funerary paintings, whose images are located directly in the ‘house of the dead’, had a much closer relationship to possible afterlife concepts than any grave goods, on which such interpretations are increasingly imposed.

Fifth-Century BC Greek Funerary *Lekythoi*’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 59 (2016), pp. 4–6, 8, Figs 1–3.

¹⁵ The Etruscan denomination ‘*hinthial*’ for the shadows of Teiresias and Patroklos and others does not occur before the fifth century BCE; see Piffiff, *Religio Etrusca*, p. 163; Jean-René Jannot, *Devins, dieux et démons: Regards sur la religion de l’Etrurie antique* (Paris: Picard, 1998), pp. 71–72.

The False Door

False doors in and on tombs are known from many other places in Etruria and from many other civilisations in the ancient Mediterranean,¹⁶ but if we want to get closer to their special meaning in Tarquinian funerary painting, we should take the chance that these doors – unlike, for example, the false doors in Cerveteri – have a painted context that may contain some hints for understanding their meaning.

The phenomenon of false doors in the painted tombs of Tarquinia has become one of the most discussed problems in the scholarly debate of funerary culture, since in the late 1950s and 1960s new examples of this painted motif came to light.¹⁷ Here the false door is always part of the painted architectural setting of the chamber tombs, which were to evoke the interior of a simple – mostly one-roomed – gable-roofed house. In such a house, a second door facing the entrance door could either be another exit out of the house or lead into another room. In Tarquinia, we find such a door painted from the first half of the sixth century onwards.¹⁸

The earlier examples, all in tombs of the first half of the sixth century BCE, in which the architectural details are still less developed and which are – in contrast to some sculptured examples in Caeretan tombs¹⁹ – all of a rectangular respectively trapezoidal outline with a lintel protruding on the sides (*porta dorica*); the door is the only decoration that appears on the walls, mainly on the back wall of the tomb between the two stone benches for

¹⁶ Tasso, *Pylai Aidao*, pp. 1–50.

¹⁷ Up to then, only seven examples were known, although ten more can now be added: Massimo Pallottino, ‘Tarquinia’, *Monumenti antichi dei Lincei*, 36 (1937), pp. 307–10; Friedhelm Prayon, ‘Frühetruskische Grab- und Hausarchitektur’, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 22 (1975), p. 102 n. 562; Bruno D’Agostino, ‘L’immagine, la pittura e la tomba nell’Etruria arcaica’, *Prospettiva*, 32 (1983), pp. 9–10; Jean-René Jannot, ‘Sur les fausses portes étrusques’, *Latomus*, 43.2 (1984), pp. 273–83; Valeria Vaccaro, ‘Caronti e finte porte’, in *Pittura ellenistica in Italia e in Sicilia. Linguaggi e tradizioni. Atti del convegno di studi, Messina 24–25 settembre 2009*, ed. by G. F. La Torre and M. Torelli (Rome: Bretschneider, 2011), pp. 349–50, 353–54 (schedule); Alessandro Naso, *Architetture Dipinte* (Rome: Bretschneider, 1996), pp. 417–20. Many stone monuments of the late archaic period were also found: cippi and dado tombs in Tuscania also show this motif, see Jannot, ‘Sur les fausses portes’, pp. 276–78; Tasso, *Pylai Aidao*, pp. 45–46, 50–53, gives an overview of false doors in the context of eastern funerary monuments; on pp. 46–50, she discusses the sculptured examples of southern Etruria; on pp. 53–59, the painted doors in the chamber-tombs of Tarquinia and Chiusi. The painted door in a Tuscan tomb (see Tasso, *Pylai Aidao*, p. 53 n. 300) is based on a misunderstanding.

¹⁸ In the necropolis of Cerveteri, they appear somewhat earlier in the late seventh century, hewn out in relief from the tuff. Prayon, *Die Etrusker*, pp. 102–06.

¹⁹ Prayon, *Die Etrusker*, pp. 80, 104.

the corpses (Tomba della capanna, Tomba Marchese, Tomba 12, Tomba 6120).²⁰ The door has neither lock, nor handle, nor knocker. No one can open it from the inside of the tomb and there is no means for knocking at the door so that someone on the other side would let you in.²¹ What you see is the outside of a door, which is impossible to enter.²² This is a first hint for the function or better non-function: such a door makes no sense in a real world.

This is valid also for the doors in the tombs of the late archaic period, from 525 BCE onwards, which are set into their architectural context in a ‘correct’ way and which are elaborated in detail with their bronze fittings and panel fillings in different colours.²³ They are now integrated into the figured friezes that run around the walls. Apart from tombs showing only one door on the back wall, there are some chambers in which we find three painted doors – either one on each wall (Tomba delle iscrizioni; Tomba della fustigazione), or two of them side to side on the back wall (Tomba del citaredo, Tomba 4255). These settings correspond exactly to real grave-types with either two chambers at the back (Tomba dei tori) or to those with four chambers in a cross-shaped arrangement (Tomba Bartoccini, Tomba con alberelli e corone, Tomba 1560).²⁴

The fact that the threshold of the false door in the Tomba dei leoni di giada begins only a few centimetres above the stone benches may reveal that the painted doors were not intended to be placeholders or a suggestion for passages from one room to the other, but that they were intended as symbolic doors that would lead into a further space, an imaginary room.²⁵

This evoked space would most likely be the burial chamber for the soul, which, once separated from the body, would no longer remain in its immediate vicinity. In this respect, Annalisa Tasso has argued correctly

²⁰ For a list of false doors in Tarquinia and for a bibliography of single Tarquinian tombs mentioned in the text, see the appendix below.

²¹ Prayon, *Die Etrusker*, p. 106, considers the rectangular doors to be internal doors that never led out of the tomb but were rather entrances to imaginary chambers; this fully applies to the archaic tombs of Tarquinia.

²² Jannot, *Devins, dieux et démons*, p. 276.

²³ Naso, *Architettura Dipinta*, pp. 419–20.

²⁴ Tasso, *Pylai Aidaō*, p. 56.

²⁵ Unlike Tasso, *Pylai Aidaō*, p. 57, and Matilde Marzullo, *Grotte Cornetane. Materiali e apparato critico per lo studio delle tombe di Tarquinia* (Milan: Ledizioni, 2016), p. 186, I consider the Tomba dei leoni di giada to be identical with the Tomba con porte e feline described in Wolfgang Helbig, ‘Scavi di Corneto’, *Bullettino di corrispondenza archeologica* (1884), pp. 117–18; Mario Moretti, *Nuovi monumenti della pittura etrusca* (Milan: Lerici, 1966), p. 34, had already mentioned this suspicion, but unlike Helbig, who visited the tomb in 1884, he could not see the doors on the side walls because the paintings were covered by a thick layer of *salnitro*.

that the false doors were not to be entered by anyone except the soul, which is a spiritual being. If the false door was meant to be a passage for the soul, it did not matter at all whether a real architecture was accurately reproduced, which would have been coherent for a living human being.²⁶

Let us have a closer look at the most impressive doors of the late sixth and early fifth centuries BCE. As they are embedded in a rich iconography, we would perhaps expect some evidence for the ideas connected with the space behind them. Is there any evidence that the first step through the door was the first on the long journey to the beyond, as expressed in a recent article by J. Rasmus Brandt?²⁷

In the Tomba degli auguri, two mourning men stand at both sides of the door, where the presence of bushes and birds indicates that the scene takes place in the open air as also the sport scenes on the other walls of the tomb (Figure 9.1). These sporting events represented in Etruscan tomb paintings are in general interpreted as the funeral games for the dead and, in this case, the mourning figures on the back wall in the field of vision of any visitor of the tomb would certainly reinforce such an interpretation. Massimo Pallottino therefore suggested that the painted door should indicate the entrance of the tomb in front of which – outside, in the necropolis – mourning and games were performed as part of the funerary ceremonies.²⁸

One has certainly to assume that the mourning gestures refer to the deceased.²⁹ But the deceased – the corpse – lay inside the chamber, as

²⁶ Tasso, *Pylai Aidaō*, p. 56.

²⁷ J. Rasmus Brandt, 'Passage to the Underworld. Continuity or Change in Etruscan Funerary Ideology (6th – 2nd Centuries B.C.)?', in *Death and Changing Rituals. Function and Meaning in Ancient Funerary Practices*, ed. by J. R. Brandt, M. Prusac-Lindhagen, and H. Roland (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015), p. 118.

²⁸ Pallottino, 'Tarquinia', p. 21.

²⁹ Since the men's gesture has been referred to as a gesture of greeting, I would like to emphasize that there can be no doubt about its interpretation as a gesture of mourning. The men bring their hands to their heads, which is typical for this. The outstretched arm with the palm downwards appears on Attic vases of the second half of the sixth century, especially with men participating in *prothesis*. We find the same gesture on the right wall of the Tomba del Morente in Tarquinia on a man at the foot of the *prothesis*; Ingeborg Huber, *Die Ikonographie der Trauer in der griechischen Kunst* (Mannheim: Bibliopolis, 2001), p. 99 Fig. 7; p. 109 Fig. 9; pp. 202–03, 204–05; similarly, Marta Pedrina, *I gesti del dolore nella ceramica attica (VI – V secolo a.C.), Per un'analisi della comunicazione non verbale nel mondo greco* (Padova: La Garangola, 2001), p. 256 Fig. 38. Therefore, the suggestion by D'Agostino, 'L'immagine', p. 19, to consider the false door as synonymous to the person of the deceased, is not convincing, as he justifies this solely with the supposed greeting gesture: 'Io credo piuttosto che la porta chiusa rappresenti il morto sotto la specie dell'assenza, dell'essere separato dal mondo dei viventi; in ogni caso la porta chiusa è metafora del personaggio cui la tomba è dedicata; così si spiega

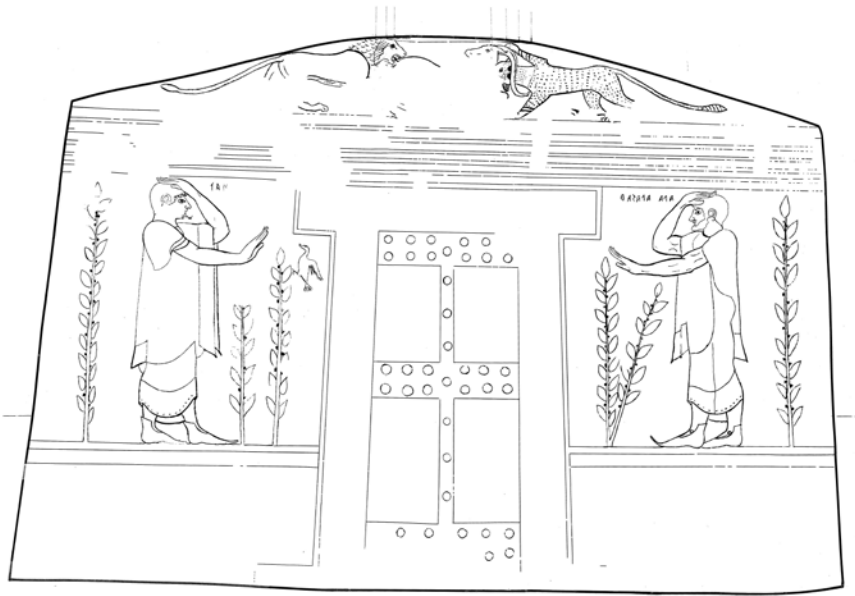


Figure 9.1: Tomba degli auguri, backwall, depicting two mourning men at both sides of a false door; bushes and birds indicate that the scene is thought to take place in the open. © Weber-Lehmann.

the cavities in the floor, which were made for two wooden sarcophagi, clearly show.³⁰ These were positioned along the side walls at the back of the chamber so that their front edges ended directly under the feet of the

anche la scena sulla parete di fondo della tomba degli Auguri, e il gesto di saluto, di commiato che “gli auguri” rivolgono verso la porta chiusa ...’ (‘Rather, I believe that the closed door represents the dead in the form of absence, of being separated from the world of the living; in any case, the closed door is a metaphor of the person to whom the tomb is dedicated; this also explains the scene on the back wall of the Augurs’ tomb, and the gesture of greeting, of farewell that “the augurs” address towards the closed door ...’). Following D’Agostino’s interpretation: Agnès Rouveret, ‘Espace sacré, espace pictural: Une hypothèse sur quelques peintures archaïques de Tarquinia’, *AION, Archeologia e storia antica*, 10 (1988), pp. 204, 211; Naso, *Architetture Dipinte*, p. 420; Luca Cerchiai, ‘La tomba del topolino’, *Annali di archeologia e storia antica. Dipartimento di studi del mondo classico e del mediterraneo antico*, N.S. 8 (2001), p. 80; Luca Cerchiai, ‘I pugili ai lati della porta’, in *Pittura etrusca. Problemi e prospettive. Atti del convegno 26/27 ottobre 2001*, ed. by A. Minetti (Siena: Protagon Editori Toscani, 2003), p. 99. The symbolic-metaphorical content of the door is always asserted without any further arguments.

³⁰ Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, ‘The Evidence for Wooden Sarcophagi in Etruscan Tombs’, *Etruscan Studies*, 10 (2004–07), p. 149 n. 6.

wailing men. In this way, the mourners could also be directly related to the deceased who lie at their feet in the tomb itself.³¹ This would fit well with the observation that scenes of lamentation are usually found during the laying out of the body, the *prothesis*, as we see in the Tomba del morto and Tomba del morente. The image in the Tomba degli auguri, then, should not be taken as an argument to explain the false door as a sort of personification of the dead, as has been repeatedly suggested by some authors.³²

The paintings adjacent to the false door in the following graves do not always refer so clearly to it and we do not know to what extent they would refer to a wooden sarcophagus placed in the tomb. In the Tomba delle olimpiadi,³³ painted by the same workshop as the Tomba degli auguri, we also find athletic games on the side walls and on the entrance wall. The false door is in the centre of the back wall, but the figures next to it do not seem to have anything to do with the door or with the games (Figure 9.2). Åke Åkerström was the first to suggest that a mythological scene might be represented and not – as usually assumed – spectators of the sporting events. In any case, all the five figures are not facing the door but are turning their backs to it.³⁴ Here the door is even separating the mythological scene, which in my opinion can be interpreted as the judgement of Paris, the Trojan prince who had to decide which of the three goddesses, Hera, Athena, or Aphrodite, was the most beautiful.³⁵ This theme was apparently popular in Etruria as early as the second half of the seventh century BCE as we see it

³¹ So also Pallottino, 'Tarquinia', p. 21.

³² See note 29.

³³ For this tomb, it is not known whether the cavities in the ground existed, as the frescoes were removed and displayed in the *Museo nazionale di Tarquinia*, while the original burial chamber was closed again.

³⁴ Åke Åkerström, 'The tomba delle Olimpiadi in Tarquinia: Some Problems in Etruscan Tomb Painting', in *Scritti di Archeologia ed Arte in onore di Carlo Maurilio Lericì*, ed. by L. Cavagnaro Vanoni and S. Ponzanelli (Stockholm: Istituto italiano di cultura C. M. Lericì, 1970), pp. 68–69, did not realise that the figure on the left has the red skin colour of male figures whereas the women are always drawn in outline and have white skin. So, the figures are Hermes, Athena, and Hera – moving away after the judgement, and on the other side of the door (not mentioned and left without any explanation by Åkerström) is Aphrodite, lifting her dress with both hands to show her beautiful ankles, and the naked youth Paris, fleeing from her, as he is overwhelmed by her appearance. For the explanation of this version of the myth, in which Paris is fleeing, see Anneliese Kossatz-Deissmann, 'Paridis iudicium', in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, ed. by H. C. Ackermann, J.-R. Gisler, and L. Kahil, 8 vols (Zürich: Artemis, 1994), vii, p. 178 nos. 5–21, 24, and for the gesture of showing her erotic charms by lifting her robe, see no. 22.

³⁵ Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, 'The Archaic Period', in *Etruscan Painting: Catalogue Raisonné of Etruscan Wall Paintings*, ed. by S. Steingraber (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), p. 50.

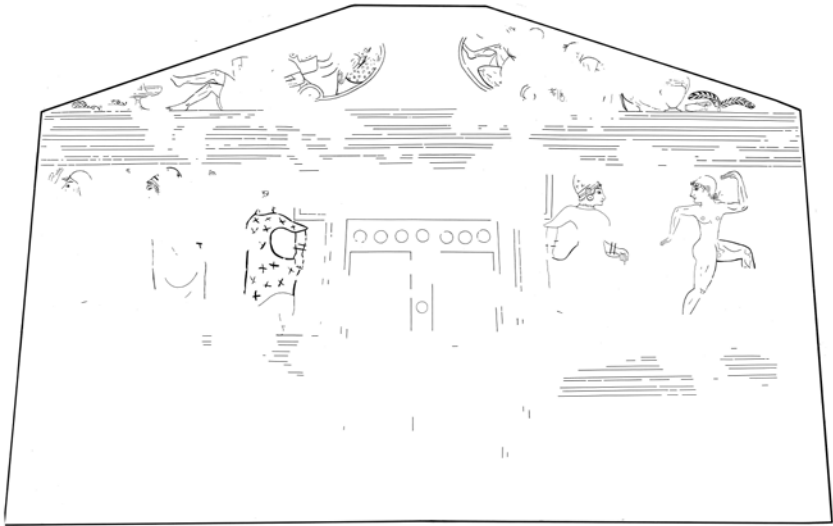


Figure 9.2: Tomba delle olimpiadi, backwall, showing the gods Hermes, Hera, Athena and Aphrodite next to the false door. The fleeing figure of a male youth is the Trojan prince, Paris. © Weber-Lehmann.

first on the Chigi Jug from Veji³⁶ and on many Attic black-figured vases of the second half of the sixth century from Etruria, and which has also been handed down twice in Cerveteri's wall painting.³⁷

In this case, the depictions beside the door cannot be located in the context of a special death ritual that would have taken place in front of the door. Here the door remains isolated as in the early Tarquinian tombs

³⁶ Matteo D'Acunto, *Il mondo del vaso Chigi, Pittura, guerra e società a Corinto alla metà del VII secolo a.C.* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 113–23.

³⁷ For the Bocanera Plaques, see Sybille Haynes, 'Ein etruskisches Parisurteil', *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung*, 83 (1976), pp. 227–31, and for the special characterisation of Aphrodite, pp. 229–30; Jette Christiansen, 'En etruskisk Afrodite', *Meddelelser fra NY Carlsberg Glyptotek* (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1988), pp. 47–68; Daniele F. Maras, 'Il mito della dea nuda', in *Pittura di terracotta. Mito e immagine nelle lastre dipinte di Cerveteri*, ed. by A. Russo, R. Cosentino, and R. Zaccagnini (Rome: Gangemi, 2018), pp. 136–37, rejects this interpretation because he cannot imagine the woman depicted in a very transparent garment as Aphrodite, as he erroneously describes her as completely naked. But although he gives a possible explanation for this, he prefers interpreting the scene as Artemis and Aktaion, which is much less convincing, as we do not have any other representation of this myth in the sixth century.

without figurative paintings or with only heraldic animals, such as lions or panthers in the pediment. Instead, in the Tomba delle olimpiadi, the pediment above the door shows a rich banqueting scene on the ground, with four males, obviously drunk from the wine that they have taken from a *krater*, standing on the left. From the small overturned *olpe* at its side, we can learn that the *krater* is now empty. It seems that here the door relates to the wine-consuming scene and that there is a close connection between the two. We will take this as a challenge to keep the issue in mind while looking at the following examples of false doors.

In the Tomba delle iscrizioni, which is stylistically and chronologically very close to the previously discussed examples, we can see a very rich pictorial programme on the sides of the entrance wall and between the three false doors placed in the centre of the back wall and in the middle of each of the side walls. As the tomb is quite large,³⁸ it seems possible that three or more burials were placed in the chamber so that the three doors could relate to them. The representations of the entrance wall had already been in such bad condition when the tomb was first documented by Thürmer in 1829, that we cannot be sure about their precise meaning.³⁹ On the adjacent section of the left side wall, athletes were depicted again, this time wrestlers and boxers, accompanied by a flute player. To the right of the false door on the left wall, we see a horserace, which has just finished, directed to the false door in the centre of the back wall, where the riders are received by a young man. On the opposite side of the door and arranged around the corner opposite to the riders on the left we see eight men moving towards the central false door, carrying the *krater*, cups, and a jug as they are dancing to the music of an *aulos* in a *komos*. It seems quite probable that the scene on the right wall, right of the false door, may show the banquet room just left by them. The revellers have their names written beside their heads and thus we know that here specific individuals are meant. The ensemble of the paintings in this tomb seemed to refer rather to a funerary ritual than to metaphoric allusion, and so Pallottino interpreted the false doors as the depiction of the actual entrance of the tombs, in front of which these rituals happened.⁴⁰ The drinking of wine and the sporting

³⁸ Length 4.65 m × width 3.75 m × height 2.02 m; height of walls 1.65 m compared with Tomba degli Auguri: length 3.62 m × width 2.60 m × height 1.90 m; height of walls 1.55 m.

³⁹ Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, 'Die Tomba delle Iscrizioni, Bemerkungen', in *Etruskische Grabmalerei: Faksimiles und Aquarelle*, ed. by M. Moltesen and C. Weber-Lehmann (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1992), p. 65.

⁴⁰ Pallottino, 'Tarquinia', p. 322: 'Con tale valutazione concorda la spiegazione già accettata del motivo delle false porte come indicazione schematica delle celle mortuarie; donde consegue il valore realistico e attuale del rimpianto e del culto, rivolti non già al simbolo del mondo invisibile e soprannaturale, ma al corpo del

contests in honour of the dead are here apparently equally weighted rites, which applied to the soul of the deceased beyond the door and which were apparently intended to guarantee the good passage of the soul into this space. The festivity happened around the dead bodies buried inside the chamber and at the same time outside the place, where the souls had gone and to which the community of the performers could not have access.

In the Tomba Cardarelli, the *komos* takes place in a beautifully adorned grove. The only false door in the centre of the back wall is integrated into this grove, always in the first sight of vision of the visitor, who enters the tomb coming down the *dromos* (Figure 9.3). Here sports competitions are reduced to boxing and the boxers are placed at both sides of the entrance door, vis-à-vis the painted door. Since inscriptions with names can be seen next to their heads,⁴¹ they must be regarded as real sports personalities and not as set pieces with a specific metaphorical content, as suggested by Cerchiai.⁴² On the right and on the left wall, we see male figures and one female figure dancing, carrying musical instruments, such as a lyre and *auloi*, as well as drinking equipment like cups, a sieve, and a jug. However, the two musicians on the back wall turn their backs to the dancing figures and are completely oriented towards and related to the false door, obviously playing another melody. I have already argued elsewhere that they are most probably playing the *threnos*; thus, they are not taking part in the *komos* but, much like the wailing men in the Tomba degli auguri, they are performing a rite that accompanies the dead to his last abode.⁴³

It may be of some importance to have a closer look at the two vessels that are standing at the feet of the musicians next to the door, a big amphora with its lid and a *krater*. These are the typical vessels necessary for

defunto supposto giacente oltre le porte, anche se di fatto deposto entro i limiti del sepolcro dipinto' ('The already accepted explanation of the motif of the false doors as a schematic indication of the mortuary cells agrees with this assessment; hence the realistic and topical value of the mourning and worship, addressed not to the symbol of the invisible and supernatural world, but to the body of the deceased supposedly lying beyond the doors, although in fact laid within the limits of the painted tomb').

⁴¹ Massimo Morandi, 'Rivista di epigrafia etrusca, no. 14–15', *Studi Etruschi*, 63 (1999), pp. 383–85, and Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, 'Dependencies in Etruscan Tomb Painting', in *Dependency and Social Inequality in Pre-Roman Italy*, ed. by M. Bentz and P. Zeidler (Berlin: De Gruyter, Forthcoming).

⁴² Cerchiai, 'I pugili', p. 84.

⁴³ Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, 'Ritus und Kultus: Taugliche Topoi zur Interpretation der etruskischen Grabmalerei?', in *Kulte, Riten, religiöse Vorstellungen bei den Etruskern und ihr Verhältnis zu Politik und Gesellschaft: Akten der 1. Internationalen Tagung der Sektion Wien/Österreich des Istituto Nazionale di Studi Etruschi ed Italici (Wien, 4.–6. 12. 2008)*, ed. by P. Amann (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 2012), pp. 276–81.

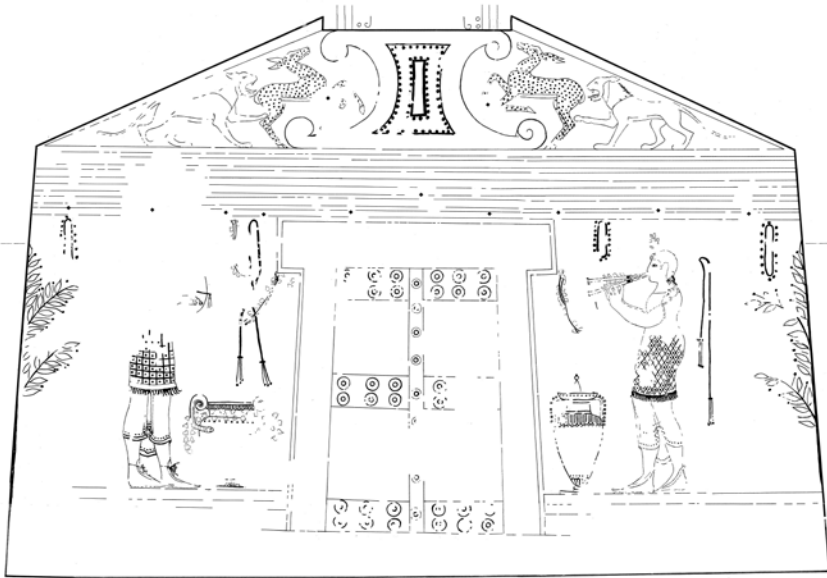


Figure 9.3: Tomba Cardarelli, backwall, depicting two musicians, a kithara player and an aulos player, performing a rite that accompanies the dead to his last abode. © Weber-Lehmann.

wine consumption at a feast. As a rule, a *komos* always follows a *symposion* on Greek vases, and we can also presume that the participants of the *komos* – as we see them in the Tomba Cardarelli as well as those of the Tomba delle iscrizioni – had drunk wine during a preceding banquet.⁴⁴ In the Tomba Cardarelli, then, a funerary ritual – the *threnos* – and the feast are linked by the wine vessels and their highlighted place beside the false door. We find the pair of vessels in at least one other tomb with *komos* scenes, the Tomba della fustigazione, placed on either side of the false door of the back wall.⁴⁵ But can we recognize any special meaning in this? On the other hand – in

⁴⁴ For example, on the Attic red-figure drinking bowls of the late Archaic period – the *komos* mainly thematises the exuberance after the excessive drinking of wine and there too, as in the depictions in Tarquinia, the utensils for serving wine are carried along.

⁴⁵ It is quite probable that also in the Tomba della porta di bronzo and Tomba del teschio such vessels had been painted, as both of the tombs show the musicians in the back wall beside the false door, but Tomba della porta di bronzo is very much destroyed at these points and in Tomba del teschio the *salnitro* was never taken off, as the tomb was closed and filled in again. On one photograph (Marzullo, *Grotte Cornetane*, p. 358), however, you can make out the shadow of at least one of the vessels, standing on the ground between the *aulos* blower and the door.

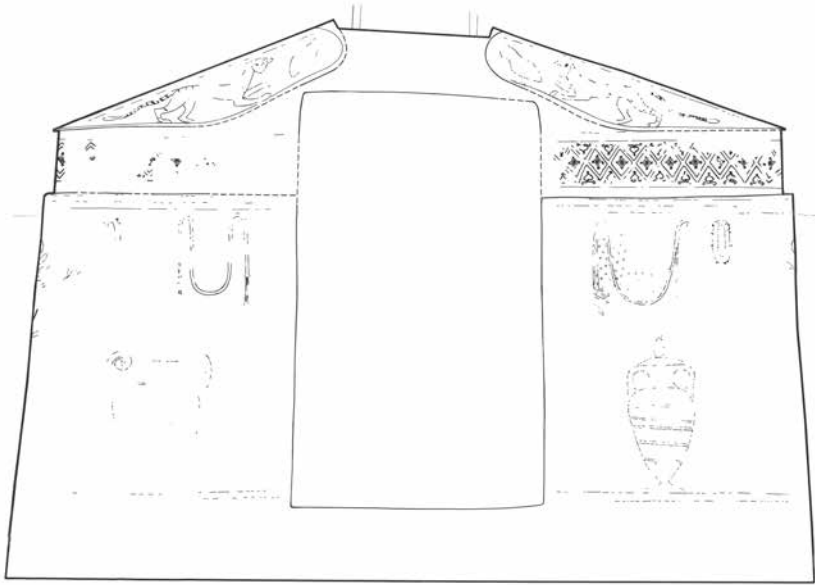


Figure 9.4: Tomba 5591, entrance wall. At both sides of the entrance to the chamber tomb an amphora and a krater, vessels for the consumption of wine.
© Weber-Lehmann.

the lack of a false door – they appear on both sides of the real entrance door in the Tomba 5591, though the paintings are made by the same workshop as the two tombs just mentioned (Figure 9.4).

In the Tomba della caccia e pesca, which has two consecutive chambers, there is no false door either. Here we find the two wine vessels standing among the trees of the richly adorned grove in which the tiny revellers are dancing: the amphora is placed on the right, the *krater* on the left wall (Figures 9.5, 9.6, 9.6a).⁴⁶ Unlike the same types of vessels in the many banqueting scenes, where the *krater* and the amphora are placed side by side on the buffet table,⁴⁷ the two containers are separated in the *komos*

⁴⁶ The crater is not visible at first sight; only part of its silhouette could be discerned while copying the paintings. The remains of a male figure can be most probably interpreted as belonging to a lyre or kithara player, as he is standing with both feet firmly on the ground and is not dancing like the others (Figures 9.6 and 9.6a).

⁴⁷ Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, ‘Zur Ausstattung etruskischer Klinengelage: Ergebnisse historischer und moderner Dokumentationen der Grabmalereien Tarquinias’, in *La peinture funéraire antique. Actes du VIIe colloque de l’association internationale pour la peinture murale antique, Vienne 1998*, ed. by A. Barbet (Paris: Errance, 2001), Figs 9–11. Tombs with banqueting scenes on the walls never show a false door. Up until now, the Tomba del biclinio was thought to be the only exception, but I have been able to demonstrate

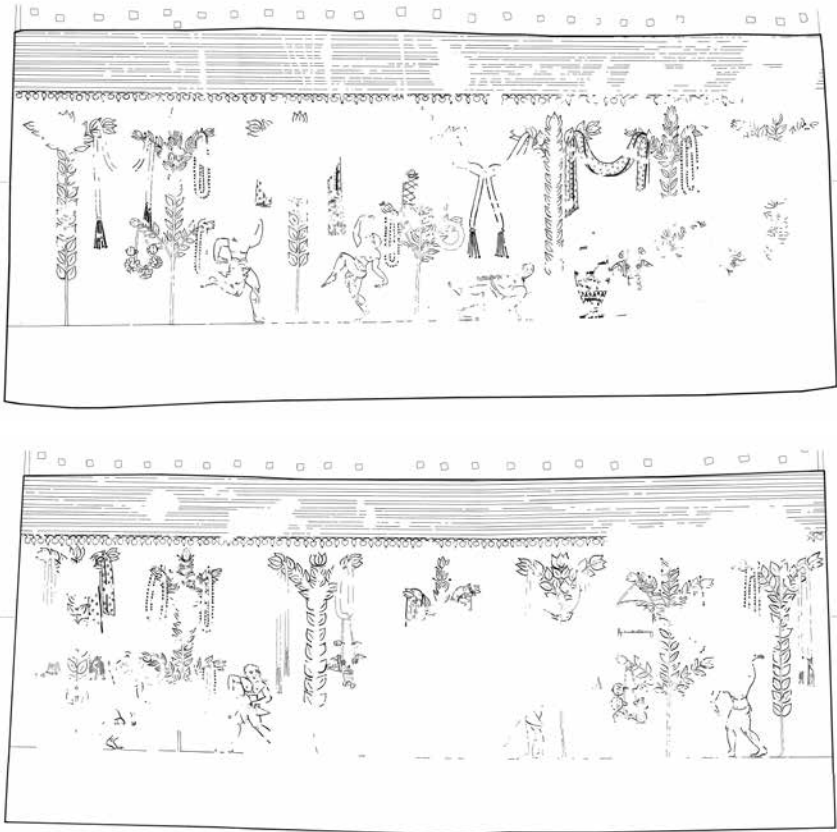


Figure 9.5: Tomba della caccia e pesca, first chamber, right wall; richly adorned grove where a musician is blowing an aulos while lying on the ground on his back, behind him a big amphora. © Weber-Lehmann.

Figure 9.6: Tomba della caccia e pesca, first chamber, left wall. We can see the legs of a kithara player under a large area of damaged wall. In front of his feet traces of the right side of a large crater. © Weber-Lehmann.

scenes: framing a (false) door or – as in the Tomba della caccia e pesca – encompassing the first chamber, which was the passageway to the back chamber, where the dead were buried.

that this tomb, as it survives in the drawings of the eighteenth/nineteenth century, never existed. It is a pasticcio from various models and so we cannot say whether Byres saw a tomb in which a false door was combined with banquet scene: Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, 'La tomba del Biclinio: Pretese e realtà', in *Atti del convegno: Facsimile 2. Parigi/Tours ottobre 2021* (Tours: Université de Tours, Forthcoming).

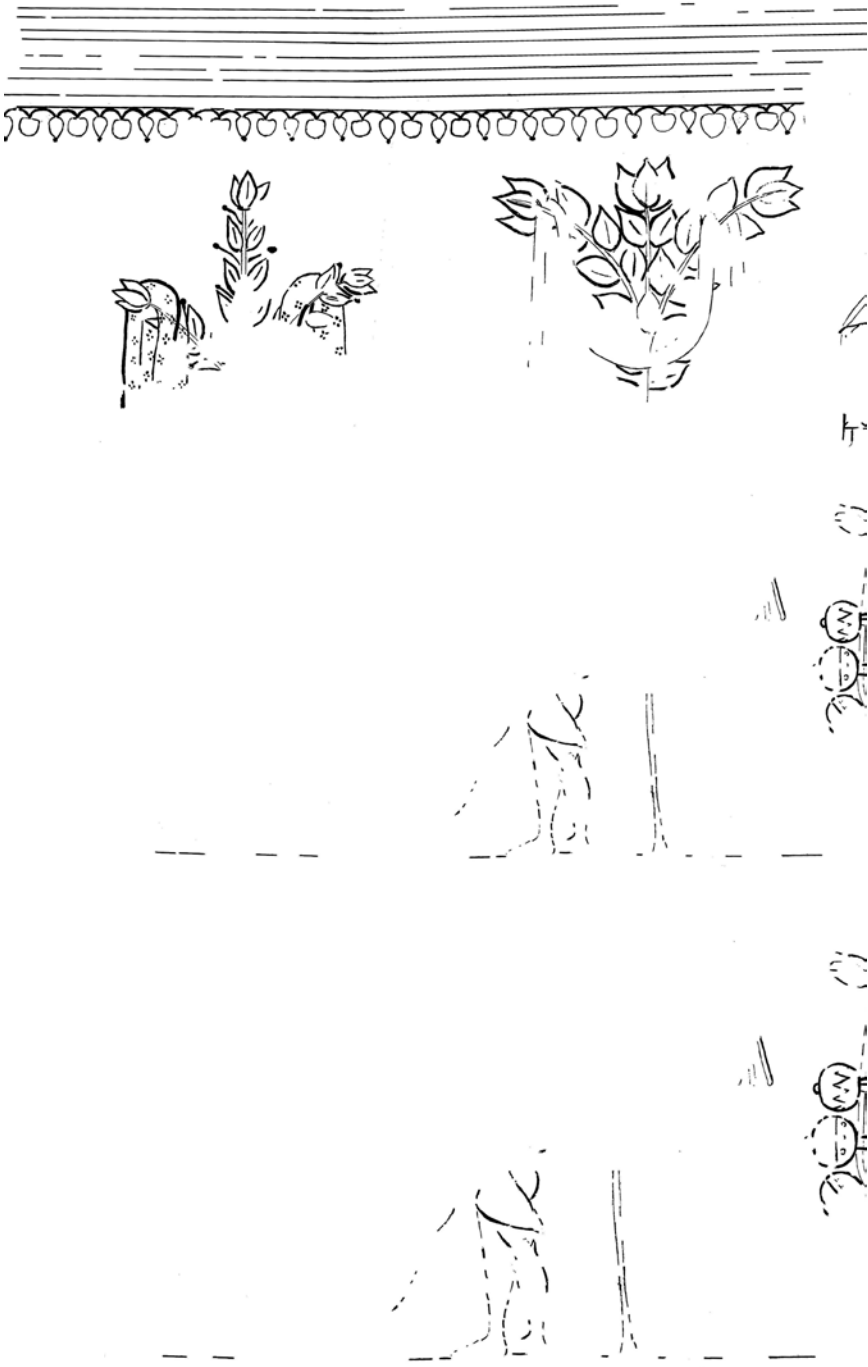


Figure 9.6a: Detail of the scene described in 9.6.

Although at first sight it may seem that the exact placement of the certainly meaningful and important motif of the two vessels is arbitrary and can change depending on the situation in the chamber, the four surviving examples show that this is not the case. In all the four cases, the amphora and *krater* enclose the passage of the deceased: in the Tomba della caccia e pesca, with two chambers, the corpse is carried through the ‘antechamber’ during the funeral to his final resting place into the second one, where the wine vessels are depicted on the side walls. In the Tomba 5591, with only one chamber, the corpse is carried through the entrance door with the wine vessel at each side of it and the further way of the soul had to be subsumed in this. Likewise, in the tombs Cardarelli and della fustigazione, where the vessels stand at the sides of the false door on the back wall, it is foreshadowed that the soul will continue on its way to its final abode through the passageway of the illusory door.

In this context, I would like to give attention to an observation that Giovanni Colonna made some years ago.⁴⁸ According to Colonna, the entrances of the tomb chambers, which are carved out of rock in the shape of a door and closed from the outside by two or three rectangular blocks of stone, show only occasionally a red ‘Doric’ doorframe on the inside, i.e. on the side facing the chamber. From the outside, i.e. towards the *dromos*, the door is conspicuously never framed or architecturally designed so that the passage is only perceptible as a specially designed door from the inside, when one looks back out of the tomb.

This phenomenon appears from about 480 BCE onwards, about the same time when the false doors are gradually disappearing from the repertoire of tomb painters.⁴⁹ Colonna took this Doric frame of the real entrance as a substitute for the false door and as he considered the latter as the entrance to the afterworld, he interpreted anything represented in those tomb chambers as located in the world beyond, first of all the manifold banqueting scenes.⁵⁰ As such, the doorframes in these later tombs were to substitute the painted false ones insofar as they would allude to the tomb as the last abode, not only for the corpse but also for the soul.

However, Colonna’s idea can be refuted by the paintings in the Tomba del letto funebre, where the entrance door is framed in the manner mentioned above: on the back wall and on the adjacent parts of the side walls, we see a banquet scene underneath a tent, which clearly represents

⁴⁸ Colonna, ‘Osservazioni’, pp. 69–71.

⁴⁹ In the Tomba del citaredo, the frame appears for the first time despite the fact that there are two false doors painted on the back wall; see no. 57, Fig. 136, in Stephan Steingraber et al., eds, *Etruscan Painting: Catalogue Raisonné of Etruscan Wall Paintings* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), p. 309.

⁵⁰ Colonna, ‘Osservazioni’.

a cultic event, accompanied by scenes of athletic games. Such cultic action can hardly take place in Hades on the Isle of the Blessed.⁵¹ I think that one should not read too much into pictorial changes that may also simply be due to the change of painting workshops and of fashions.

The observation vis-à-vis the wine vessels may lead to the conclusion that wine consumption by the bereaved accompanied and enclosed the dead body on its way to its grave and – performed as a rite – even beyond the grave.⁵² The same may be deduced regarding the two musicians in their special robe beside the false door in the Cardarelli Tomb. In other tombs, they can also appear on the entrance wall or even on the doorposts.⁵³ This very special sort of canonical arrangement and repetition, as well as the one with the vessels, can be a hint of a ritual performed during the burial ceremony and maybe also during some special repetitive days of remembrance of the dead, in which wine consumption obviously played an important role, be it as a rite or in ideas about the afterlife.

The consumption of wine automatically is leading us to Dionysus and his circle. And indeed, we find many other Dionysian themes in the late archaic paintings of Tarquinia, such as the drunken revellers in the Olimpiadi and other tombs,⁵⁴ the big flying *phallos* in the Tomba del topolino, the huge bronze *krater* in the Tomba delle leonesse, the pergola of ivy in the fifth-century Triclinio, Letto funebre, and Scrofa nera tombs,⁵⁵ as well as the satyrs in the pediment of Tomba delle iscrizioni and caccia e

⁵¹ Weber-Lehmann, 'Ritus und Kultus', pp. 280–81, with arguments against.

⁵² However, it is quite astonishing that the wine vessels represented on the sides of the false door are always depicted only once, even in the Tomba della fustigazione. Though the tomb has three false doors, they appear only on the back wall.

⁵³ Weber-Lehmann, 'Ritus und Kultus', pp. 276–80, 285 Figs 5, 7; p. 286 Figs 8, 10a, 10b.

⁵⁴ Luca Cerchiai, 'Il Dionisismo nell'immaginario funebre degli Etruschi', in *Il viaggio oltre la vita. Gli etruschi e l'aldilà tra capolavori e realtà virtuale*, ed. by G. Sassatelli and A. Russo Tagliente (Bologna: Bonomia University Press, 2014), pp. 38–43; Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, 'Spätarchaische Gelagebilder in Tarquinia', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*, 92 (1985), pp. 25–28, giving examples of revellers and satyrs in the pediments, kicking one leg exuberantly, which is meant to express that they have already drunk a lot of wine.

⁵⁵ These tombs do not show a *Komos* anymore; instead, we see a ritualised formation dance in the Tomba del Triclinio (Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, 'Die Tomba del Triclinio', in *Malerei der Etrusker in Zeichnungen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by H. Blanck and C. Weber-Lehmann (Mainz: von Zabern, 1985), pp. 130–32) and in the later tombs of the fifth century we see mostly women and men moving at a moderate pace, accompanied by the music of an *aulos* blower and a kitharist towards the banquet scenes, depicted on the back walls and the adjacent side walls. In the Tomba della scrofa nera and Tomba della nave, there is only an excerpt. Still further, in three later tombs, there are only excerpts of performed dancing.

pesca, the satyrs in Tomba 1999, and those accompanying the god himself in the lost Tomba di Dioniso e sileni. In some paintings, only the scrolls of ivy leaves among other plants, as in the Tomba del citaredo and Tomba del triclinio, give a more subtle hint of this Dionysian aspect. Obviously the god Dionysos played an important role in the concept of death ritual. This phenomenon can be recognised and described, but to explain it more in detail we need further information still missing at the moment.⁵⁶

Especially we have no argument to speak about initiated or adopted persons into a Dionysian mystery cult for the sixth and fifth centuries, as we may assume for later periods. Furthermore, there are objects that are not akin to Dionysos, but to other gods such as Aphrodite/Turan, such as jewels, mirrors, shawls, and fascia hung up in the grove of Tomba della caccia e pesca, as well as myrtle trees and erotic gestures and scenes.⁵⁷ On the other hand, laurel bushes and trees were akin to Apollo/Aplu.⁵⁸ I would prefer to see the whole ensemble in a more general way: the groves are obviously holy groves (*luci*) as revealed by the objects hanging in the trees.⁵⁹ As they are often combined with a *komos* or a banquet on the ground, they have certainly a strong Dionysian impact but may also allude to other deities.

As we look at the false doors and again ask for their meaning in archaic and early classical times, we may answer perhaps in the following way: the door is a hint of a further space into which the invisible spiritual part of a dead person can pass via another room, which corresponds to a further tomb chamber (or even to two or more), but at the same time, it evokes the idea of a completely unknown space laying behind it. In front of this door, we see some of the rites performed by family members or other specialised persons (musicians, sportsmen, mourners, dancers) from the

⁵⁶ Krauskopf, 'The Grave', p. 77, rejects the interpretation of a new Dionysian cult; suggested by Torelli, *Il rango*, pp. 135, 138. Cerchiai, 'Il Dionisismo', p. 40, offers the following interpretation: 'l'identificazione con Dioniso ... assume la dimensione di un'esperienza mistica di iniziazione ...' ('the identification with Dionysus ... takes on the dimension of a mystical experience of initiation ...') goes too far in my opinion, as the images do not provide this.

⁵⁷ Weber-Lehmann, 'Spätarchaische Gelagebilder', p. 32. A strong erotic connotation can be seen in the couples of Tomba 4780, Tomba della caccia e pesca and vasi dipinti and also in the judgement of Paris in Tomba delle olimpiadi, where Aphrodite plays the main role.

⁵⁸ Erika Simon, 'Die Tomba dei Tori und der etruskische Apollonkult', *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, 88 (1973), pp. 28–30.

⁵⁹ These shawls can be understood as *mitrae*, head coverings of the revellers who obviously consecrated them to the gods of the grove. They must have been made of fine embroidered fabrics, or fabrics decorated with woven patterns, and were usually draped around the head to form bonnets. Weber-Lehmann, 'Spätarchaische Gelagebilder', p. 30.

social environment of the dead. There is no reason for interpreting it as the door to the palace of Hades or to a temple, as was recently suggested by Francesco Roncalli.⁶⁰

If we assume, then, that in Tarquinia in late archaic times there was the idea that with the burial and the associated rites the soul would leave the space in which the dead body was located, we have to reflect on the question that Colonna was concerned with in seeking a substitute for the false doors that had disappeared in the second quarter of the fifth century.⁶¹ As in the late second half of the fifth century, we can find some painted tombs with one to three *loculi* in which the dead bodies were placed and which show the same red 'Doric' doorframe as the entrance doors. Colonna argued that the tomb chamber in these cases – such as in the tombs with the false doors – only serves as an antechamber (vestibule) to the place where the deceased has gone and this otherworld is made visible by the red doorframe.

The observation that certain figures and objects in tombs without false doors may also appear next to the entrance door or next to a *loculus* does not readily suggest that these are intended to be a substitute for the false door. The solemn pair of musicians next to the *loculus* of the Tomba della pulcella especially speaks rather forcefully for the real rite of the *threnos*, which guides the deceased to their final resting place. Here the *loculus* is not simply framing a double bed for a couple, with a magnificent canopy designed as a *naiskos*, unlike in other tombs with *loculi*, which show a painted couple banqueting or dancers and musicians in a grove.⁶² Consequently, this ambiguity cannot be resolved by a uniform conception of the whereabouts of the soul, which has also changed in the course of the fifth century, as is evident from the appearance of the death demons towards the end of the fifth century.⁶³

The Long and Dangerous Journey across the Ocean

We can therefore find no evidence from the paintings of what awaits the deceased or their souls behind the false door. Most importantly, we cannot assume that they will embark on a long and dangerous journey across the sea to the Isles of the Blessed or along a rocky path to Hades. We can only

⁶⁰ Francesco Roncalli, 'L'aldilà: Dall'idea al paesaggio', in *Il viaggio oltre la vita. Gli etruschi e l'aldilà tra capolavori e realtà virtuale*, ed. by G. Sassatelli and A. Russo Tagliente (Bologna: Bonomia University Press, 2015), p. 58.

⁶¹ Colonna, 'Osservazioni', pp. 69–71.

⁶² Tomba della pulcella: Weber-Lehmann, 'Ritus und Kultus', pp. 277, 285 Figs 5, 6; The Tomba 2327: banquet scenes under trees; Tomba 3242 and Tomba dei pigmei: dancers and flute player in a grove.

⁶³ In the tomb painting of Tarquinia, the demons of the Tomba dei demoni are the earliest examples to that date.

learn some details that tell us more about the handling of certain rites and the representation of the elites than about the afterlife and the ‘journey’ that follows the step through the illusory door.

However, there is one detail in Etruscan tomb paintings that has always played a crucial role for the concept of the journey to the underworld directed to the Isles of the Blessed: the young rider of a hippocamp in the pediment of the entrance wall of Tomba dei tori (Figure 9.7). He is riding on his seahorse swimming in the water, followed by a bird and a dog with a fishtail.⁶⁴ The young man on the seahorse is naked except for his blue shoes. He is moving in the direction of the entrance door towards an island. The scene does not end there but is only interrupted by the support of the roof beam, which is indicated here in painting as a square block of wood mounted with bronze plates. The scene continues on the right of it. Although the paintings are rather destroyed here, it is nevertheless possible to discern the remains of two further islands and waves to the far right of the pediment, with two ducks standing in the low water and two crabs swimming.

Almost all authors have taken this panorama as proof for the voyage of the soul to the Isles of the Blessed.⁶⁵ There are indeed some more examples of riders of hippocamps in a funerary context, apart from the well-known sculpture in the Villa Giulia from Vulci.⁶⁶ In Tuscany, a pair of them was found and it seems likely that they were mounted on the roof ridge of a house tomb.⁶⁷

If these figures would represent the dead or the soul of the dead on its way across the ocean, one wonders why the deceased – or rather their

⁶⁴ This is the only example existing until now for such a ‘*kynokampos*’.

⁶⁵ Pfiffig, *Religio Etrusca*, p. 169; Monika Boosen, *Etruskische Meeresmischwesen*, *Archaeologica* 59 (Rome: Bretschneider, 1986), p. 240 Pl. 23 and Fig. 33; Torelli, *Il rango*, p. 142; Torelli, ‘Ideologia e paesaggi della morte’, pp. 56–57; Pizzarini, ‘Il mare’, p. 76 Fig. 70; see also Anna Maria Moretti Sgubini and Laura Ricciardi, ‘Ricerche nella necropoli di Guadocinto’, *Daidalos. Studi e ricerche del dipartimento di scienze del mondo antico*, 10 (2010), p. 65, and see n. 59 for the interpretation of the sculptured examples in Tuscany.

⁶⁶ Adriano Maggiani, ‘Cavalieri vulcenti arcaici’, in *Etruria e Italia preromana. Studi in onore di Giovannangelo Camporeale*, ed. by S. Bruni, *Studia Erudita* 4 (Pisa: Serra, 2009), p. 535 n. 1, Pl. 1, Figs 1–3; Pl. 2, Fig. 3; Anna Maria Moretti Sgubini, ‘Sculpture arcaiche di Vulci: Qualche aggiornamento’, in *Etruria e Italia preromana. Studi in onore di Giovannangelo Camporeale*, ed. by S. Bruni, *Studia Erudita* 4 (Pisa: Serra, 2009), p. 623 Fig. 1.

⁶⁷ Moretti Sgubini and Ricciardi, ‘Ricerche’, pp. 61–65 Figs 14–16. These youthful riders are fully dressed in contrast to the one from Vulci in Villa Giulia; it is not quite clear whether their garment consists of two pieces, as Moretti Sgubini says, a camisole above a tunic, or in a short *chiton* with a *kolpos*; both wear pointed shoes; Mario Sanna and Luciano Proietti, *La via Clodia. Ricognizioni archeologiche nel cuore della Tuscia* (Viterbo: ArchoAres, 2019), p. 297 Fig. 316.

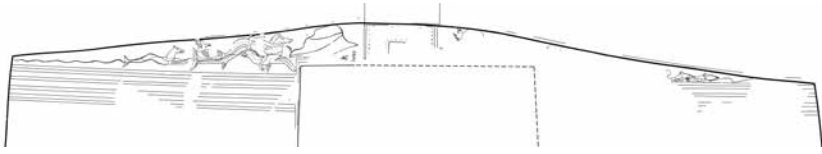


Figure 9.7: Pediment of the entrance wall of Tomba dei tori depicting a seascape with three islands and a young rider of a hippocamp.
© Weber-Lehmann.

souls – were always depicted as youthful men. In larger tombs with three or more rooms – such as the Tomba dei tori – we can assume that at least four people were buried, certainly including women. If one were to take the seascape image literally, one would logically expect the images of three more hippocamp-riders, and female ones as well. Thus, if the young men on their seahorses are not the deceased or their souls on their way across the ocean, one must ask who else might they be.

We should consider probable incidences of seahorses with riders in non-funerary situations as we look for an answer. Whereas hippocamps without riders occur quite often in animal friezes in Etruscan black-figured vases,⁶⁸ there is only one Etruscan amphora where a single hippocamp-rider is prominent on both sides of the vase.⁶⁹ Pairs of such horsemen are to be seen as the decoration of both handles of an Etruscan bronze *stamnos* from the late sixth century;⁷⁰ they are jumping off their mount like *desultores*, calling to mind the monumental sculptures of the *Dioscuri* from the Ionian temple in Lokri.⁷¹ As the *Dioscuri* had become the protective deities of the seafarers in their quality as stellar constellations,⁷² it would at least be

⁶⁸ Boosen, *Etruskische Meeresmischwesen*, pp. 171–73.

⁶⁹ Boosen, *Etruskische Meeresmischwesen*, pp. 158–59 no. 79; Françoise Gaultier, ‘Dal gruppo della Tolfa alla tomba dei tori. Tra ceramica e pittura parietale’, in *Tarquinia: Ricerche, scavi e prospettive*, ed. by M. Bonghi Jovino and C. Chiaramonte Treré (Milan: Edizioni ET, 1987), Pl. 58; and a bronze mirror with an Eros riding a hippocamp, p. 160 no. 86.

⁷⁰ Giacomo Bardelli, ‘Die Funde von der italischen Halbinsel’, in *Das Prunkgrab von Bad Dürkheim 150 Jahre nach der Entdeckung*, ed. by G. Bardelli (Monografien des RGZM 137; Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2017), p. 70 Pls 20–21.

⁷¹ John Boardman, *Griechische Plastik. Die spätclassische Zeit und die Plastik in Kolonien und Sammlungen* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998), p. 201 Fig. 166. As they are dated to the end of the fifth century only, you cannot really compare them. But the Tritons, who serve as their support, allude to their relationship to the sea.

⁷² Hom. Hymnos XXIII, Dioskuren 2, 6–17. This *hymnos* could have been known in the sixth century.

plausible that they could also be mounted on seahorses. But we must admit that up to now no further example of such a representation of the *Dioscuri* on hippocamps has come to light.

Equally unique thus far is the discovery of a terracotta hippocamp-rider from the roof of a sixth century temple on the site of the city of Cerveteri:⁷³ there is no relation at all to a funeral setting; the rider of a hippocamp cannot be understood as the deceased or his soul travelling to the world beyond. This crucial argument is also supported by the representations of hippocamps without riders and a triton on architectural terracottas from Etruscan Italic temples: as *acroteria* or painted cover slabs from several temples in Latium, Rome, and Etruria, where they have nothing to do with a funeral context.⁷⁴ Hippocamps and tritons in a heraldic arrangement appear also quite often on all kinds of bronzes, which were certainly mostly found in tombs, but one cannot easily claim that they were intended for a grave gift from the outset.⁷⁵

All of these sea dwellers are not to be restricted necessarily to the grave area and therefore not to be connected to a special eschatological meaning. As in Greek art, since all of the combined beings of the sea – as the mermen Triton and Proteus and the riders of sea horses, like Poseidon – are of divine origin,⁷⁶ I would also expect that the Etruscan riders of the hippocamps might rather be divine or at least demonic beings of the sea rather than mortals on their way to the otherworld.

Another problem arises when we look at the finding context and the iconographic context of the hippocamps with and without riders. They are mostly associated with other animals and *Mischwesen*, be it in painting or in sculpture. Apart from the *lastroni a scala* with their rich figural reliefs, which date from the first half of the sixth century onwards, there are also the monumental stone sculptures that were likewise found near tombs or

⁷³ Patricia S. Lulof, 'Hippocamp with Rider', in *Architectural Terracottas and Painted Wall Plaques, Pinakes c. 625–200 B.C.*, ed. by J. Christiansen and N. A. Winter, Catalogue Etruria I (Copenhagen: NY Carlsberg Glyptotek, 2010), pp. 148–49.

⁷⁴ Slabs: Cerveteri and Orvieto, see Avid André, *Architectural Terracottas from Etrusco Italic Temples*, Acta Instituti Romani Regni Sueciae 6 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup; Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1939), p. 196, Gruppe I: 5, Pl. 74, no. 251. I would like to thank Patricia Lulof, Amsterdam, for most valuable advice and information and Loes Opgenhaven for generous insight into her unpublished master's thesis, "'Marvellous Mischwesen', Research to the significance of the Siren, the Typhon and the Hippocamp on Late Archaic roofs in Central Italy (c. 530 – c. 450)" (M.A. Diss.; Amsterdam 2010).

⁷⁵ Ursula Höckmann, *Die Bronzen aus dem Fürstengrab von San Mariano bei Perugia* (Munich: Beck, 1982), Pls 1–7 (hippocamp and merman, cover plate of a cart), Pls 11–13 (Gorgo and hippocamps), Pls 42–46 (heraldic hippocamps and tritons).

⁷⁶ Boosen, *Etruskische Meeremischwesen*, p. 180; Steiner, *Jenseitsreise und Unterwelt*, pp. 181, 183.

tumuli. Obviously, they were positioned outside the burial chamber along the *dromos* or – as the above-mentioned example from Tuscany – on the roof of a house tomb.⁷⁷ The animals that appear at the side of the sea dwellers are lions, panthers, rams, and hybrid beings such as centaurs and sphinxes. In a very general way, they can be explained by their function of guardians of the tombs. This apotropaic function is most obvious of the lions, baring their teeth, or of the panthers with their frontal mask-like faces, which seem to fix the observer with their eyes. But are they really the dangerous beings the dead had to overcome on their journey to the otherworld?

All of these beings can also have wings. Thus, they can leave the earth or the water and take to the skies. If one looks for the commonalities between these quite different animals and mythical creatures, one finds two things: on the one hand, they represent the three spheres of land, water, and air – nothing other than the ‘cosmos’, wherein humans also have their place. At the same time, however, due to their dangerousness, their fictionality, and their hybridity, they emphasise that in each of these three spheres, and thus also in the cosmos, there are ‘dangerous’, scary, and closed-off areas that are (still) unknown to humans. Animals and hybrid beings, as well as gods and probably also deceased humans or their souls, can cross these boundaries, but not living humans. By representing the cosmos, which lies beyond comprehension, these beings are not suited to represent a specific place where the souls of the deceased would go – neither some special islands in the ocean nor a topographically locatable subterranean Hades nor a sort of heaven, as Torelli believed.⁷⁸

In the Tomba dei tori and in many other painted tombs of Tarquinia, we have a very similar situation to the stone monuments: in the six pediments of the Tomba dei tori we find a wide range of real animals, such as birds, bulls, goats, ducks, lions, and panthers, and on the other side, *Mischwesen*, such as hippocamps and sphinxes, and even mythological figures such as the Chimaira, Acheloos, and a Scythian archer.

Among all of these beings, hippocamps, representatives of the water, are depicted quite often in the last quarter of the sixth century, accompanied by tritons, dolphins, or fishes (Tomba Bartoccini, Tomba del barone, Tomba del mare, Tomba dei tritoni, Tomba Stefani), once also by serpents (Tomba dei vasi dipinti), and other animals that share their element.

In the Tomba del topolino, however, a hippocamp is the counterpart of a panther in a heraldic arrangement on each side of the support of the roof

⁷⁷ Iefke Van Kampen, ‘Stone Sculpture in the Context of Etruscan Tombs’, in *Votives, Places and Rituals in Etruscan Religion. Studies in Honor of Jean MacIntosh Turfa*, ed. by M. Gleba and H. Becker (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 144–45 Fig. 39.

⁷⁸ Torelli, *Il rango*, p. 142, considers the pediments of the painted tombs to be ‘superhuman and sanctifying spaces’ and a ‘supernatural location’.

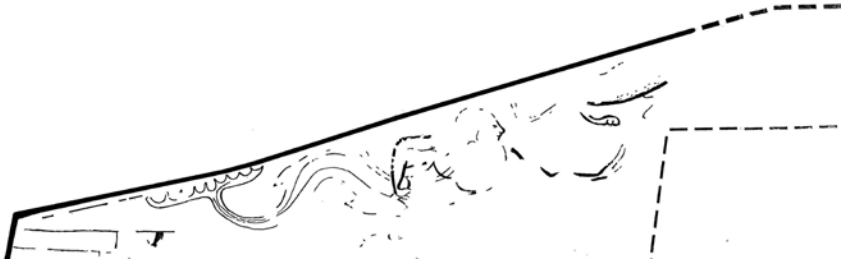


Figure 9.8: Right part of the pediment of the entrance wall in Tomba delle leonesse, showing a triton swimming in the direction of the entrance door. Above, the rest of a feline's paw. © Weber-Lehmann.

beam; the hippocamp near the banquet scene on the left, the panther near the *komos* scene on the right. And in the Tomba 5898, we see a hippocamp in the very spandrel of the pediment together with a dolphin, as companions to the banquet. Their appearance on the same level with the matress of the banquet on the ground seems incomprehensible at first glance.

But looking at all of the late archaic examples of sea dwellers and other sea motifs such as waves, we note that the context of banqueting or wine consumption is always given, be it in the above-mentioned tombs where hippocamps are depicted in the pediments, or in the Tomba delle leonesse, where we find a triton and perhaps a second one in a heraldic arrangement in the pediment of the entrance wall (Figure 9.8),⁷⁹ and skipping dolphins and flying birds above the black socle-zone ending in waves, indicating the sea. There is only one other example with skipping dolphins above a socle designed as a wave motif from the very end of the late archaic/early classical period, the Tomba del letto funebre.⁸⁰

The concept, already discussed above, that the dead would travel across the sea to the Isles of the Blessed, obviously has no difficulty in explaining the coexistence of sea dwellers and banquets. However, even with our proposed refusal of a specific location of the afterlife, a quite plausible

⁷⁹ This wall has never been described, as it is much destroyed and was covered with *salnitro*. In the small space above the tritons, there were most probably two heraldic felines, as can be deduced from the presence of one leg of such an animal, which remained after part of the ceiling above the gable collapsed.

⁸⁰ Here the waves, as in Tomba del triclinio and Tomba 5513, are already stylised, the three tombs being painted by the same workshop from 475–440 BCE, see Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, 'Beobachtungen zur Tomba 5513 in Tarquinia', in *Atti del Secondo Congresso Internazionale Etrusco: Firenze 26 Maggio – 2 Giugno 1985. Atti 1–3*, ed. by Istituto di studi etruschi ed italici (Rome: Bretschneider, 1989), pp. 233–40. This ornamental rendering of water with jumping dolphins does not appear again until the fourth century, in Tomba dell'orco I.

interpretation can be developed. Firstly, it must be pointed out that of the wild animals and of the *Mischwesen*, only the hippocamps and tritons, accompanied by dolphins or fishes, have something to do with the ocean; the role of the other creatures remains doubtful.

Secondly, it is not at all compelling that the banquets take place in the otherworld. At least it remains conceivable that these were (also) events of the bereaved, to which the ritual drinking of wine and the conspicuously frequent connection with a *komos* give a distinctly Dionysian character. The appearance of the entourage of Dionysus in some graves emphasises this connection quite particularly. Thirdly, the ocean and its dwellers have obviously something to do with the god Dionysus, whose importance for the Etruscan cult of the dead we have already discussed above.

Within this overall picture, one can state a development in the last quarter of the sixth century BCE from the more vague, undetermined, and encompassing concept of the 'cosmic' beyond to one that focuses more on ritual activities in order to bring about the support of a god, obviously Dionysus.

Conclusion

The changing iconographies in funerary paintings, a genre that spans four centuries, indicate in my opinion that the Etruscans, like the Greeks, adapted their respective ideas of what awaited them after death to the diverse religious currents in Italy and the Mediterranean at different times and in different places. In any case, in their earlier paintings, I find aspects with different emphases, which can only be understood if one has the entire repertoire before one's eyes and can also perceive minor changes. We therefore focussed on those two themes – false door and hippocamp-rider – that seemed to offer the most explicit view of 'Death imagined' by the Etruscans. Surprisingly, however, the spectrum of possible interpretations turned out to be much broader and more open than the prevailing opinion had led us to expect.

In this paper, I could not discuss later periods of tomb painting and other genres of monuments – such as the relief *stelae* of Bologna with their rich imagery, which come up just at the time when I ended my 'Some Thoughts'.⁸¹ About that time, the early classical period, the ideas of what

⁸¹ This material has been extensively studied and discussed in recent years by Elisabetta Govi and others: Elisabetta Govi, 'Lo studio delle stele felsinee. Approccio metodologico e analisi del linguaggio figurative', *Annali della fondazione per il museo 'Claudio Faina'*, 21 (2014), pp. 127–86; Govi, *Studi*, 2015; Giuseppe Sassatelli and Alfonsina Russo Tagliente, eds, *Il Viaggio oltre la vita. Gli etruschi e l'aldilà tra capolavori e realtà virtuale* (Bologna: Bonomia University Press, 2014).

happens after death underwent a renewed change of direction. ‘Death imagined’ is a never-ending topic that needs to be considered and discussed very carefully again and again.

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- . ‘La tomba del Biclinio: Pretese e realtà’, in *Atti del convegno: Facsimile 2. Parigi/Tours ottobre 2021* (Tours: Université de Tours, Forthcoming).

Appendix

List of the Tarquinian tombs mentioned in the text (in alphabetical order); those showing one or more false doors are marked with an asterisk.⁸²

Tomba:

- Con Alberelli e Corone: St No. 38; Mz p. 15.
 Degli Auguri*: St No. 42; Mz pp. 29–34.
 Del Barone: St No. 44; Mz pp. 39–44.
 Bartoccini: St No. 45; Mz pp. 45–48.
 Del Biclinio*: St No. 46; Mz pp. 55–57.
 Della Caccia e Pesca: St No. 50; Mz pp. 69–76.
 Della Capanna*: St No. 52; Mz pp. 83–85.
 Cardarelli*: St No. 53; Mz pp. 86–91.
 Del Citaredo**: St No. 57; Mz pp. 100–03.
 Dei Demoni: Mz pp. 115–19.
 Dioniso e sileni: St No. 59; Mz p. 120.
 Della Fustigazione***: St No. 67; Mz pp. 144–46.
 Dei Giocolieri: St No. 70; Mz pp. 156–58.
 Delle Iscrizioni***: St No. 74; Mz pp. 166–72.
 Delle Leonesse: St No. 77; Mz pp. 178–82.
 Dei Leoni di Giada*(**): St No. 79; Mz pp. 186–87.

⁸² As a reference I only mention Steingräber: 1986 (= St) and the more recent catalogue by Marzullo: 2016 (= Mz), in which one can also find all the necessary images and the relevant literature on the respective tomb.

- Del Letto funebre: St No. 82; Mz pp. 195–200.
Marchese 114*: St No. 85; Mz pp. 212–13.
Del Mare: St No. 86; Mz pp. 215–18.
Del Morente: St No. 88; Mz pp. 230–33.
Del Morto: St No. 89; Mz pp. 237–42.
Delle Olimpiadi*: St No. 92; Mz pp. 250–52.
Del Orco I: St No. 93; Mz pp. 253–60.
Dei Pigmei: St No. 97; Mz pp. 285–88.
Porta di Bronzo*: St No. 100; Mz pp. 296–97.
Con Porte e felini***: St No. 101; Mz p. 298.
Della Pulcella: St No. 103; Mz pp. 301–06.
Della Scrofa nera: St No. 108; Mz pp. 331–33.
Stefani: St No. 112; Mz pp. 348–49.
Del Teschio*: St No. 116; Mz pp. 357–58.
Del Topolino*: St No. 119; Mz pp. 375–78.
Dei Tori: St No. 120; Mz pp. 379–87.
Del Triclinio: St No. 121; Mz pp. 388–93.
Dei Tritoni: St No. 122; Mz pp. 394–95.
Dei Vasi Dipinti: St No. 123; Mz pp. 406–11.
No. 12*: Mz pp. 425–26.
No. 1560: St No. 138; Mz pp. 510–12.
No. 1999: St No. 141; Mz pp. 561–65.
No. 2327 (Bertazzoni): St No. 143; Mz pp. 49–51.
No. 3242 (Loculi): St No. 147; Mz pp. 201–03.
No. 4255**: St No. 155; Mz pp. 644–47.
No. 4780: St No. 157; Mz pp. 658–61.
No. 5513 (Bettini): St No. 162; Mz pp. 52–54.
No. 5591 (Moretti): St No. 164; Mz pp. 234–36.
No. 5898 (Con Coroncine): St No. 167; Mz pp. 107–08.11.
No. 6120*: St No. 171; Mz pp. 807–08.

Chapter 10

Grief Is Displayed as a Mix Between Festival and Rite: The Roman Emperor and the Experience of Death

Panayiotis Christoforou

This chapter will focus on experience in the rituals that accompany the death of the Roman emperor, a figure of high importance in the politics, culture, and society of the Roman world from the creation of the position by Augustus through to late Antiquity and beyond.¹ The reason for this choice is that the emperor, as a symbol and centralising figure, enjoyed a good degree of focus, which means that we have a great deal of evidence about their lives and activities.² Given that he was the centre of attention and a figure around which society revolved, how society reacted when such an individual died can be fertile ground for understanding how death, through

¹ The literature on the Roman emperor is immense. See Panayiotis Christoforou, *Imagining the Roman Emperor: Perceptions of Rulers in the High Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), for an overview of the position. Thought-provoking discussions of the emperor's power can be found in the following titles: Emma Dench, *Empire and Political Cultures in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Björn C. Ewald and Carlos F. Noreña, eds, *The Emperor and Rome: Space, Representation, and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Egon Flaig, *Den Kaiser herausfordern: Die Usurpation im Römischen Reich* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1992); Olivier Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors: Roman Rulers and the Constraints of Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Olivier Hekster, 'Identifying Tradition. Augustus and the Constraint of Formulating Sole Rule', *Politica Antica*, 7 (2017), pp. 47–60; Olivier Hekster, *Caesar Rules: The Emperor in the Changing Roman World C. 50 BC–AD 565* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 B.C.–A.D. 337)* (London: Duckworth, 1977); Carlos F. Noreña, *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); John Rich, 'Making the Emergency Permanent: *Auctoritas*, *Potestas* and the Evolution of the Principate of Augustus', in *Des réformes augustéennes*, ed. by Yann Rivière (Rome: École française de Rome, 2012), pp. 37–121.

² For this approach, see Dench, *Empire*, esp. ch. 5, Millar, *The Emperor*, and Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, pp. 1–5, for a stress on how the emperor appeared.

the view of such an important figure, was perceived. In short, given that we are informed of the death and burial of the Roman emperor, it follows that we are in a good position to observe approaches to death by focusing on that figure.

Still, understanding death in antiquity is a slippery proposition. Though we are highly ‘informed’ about the dead in the forms of burial sites, funerary inscriptions, and contemplations on death from Greco-Roman antiquity, our axioms are built on shaky foundations, since our evidence is disparate and can range over time and geographical location.³ This disparateness is also true of the Roman emperors, since there were only 21 emperors from the reign of Augustus, who died in 14 CE, to Septimius Severus, who ruled from 193–211 CE. As such, such funerals and state occasions were few and far between, even if we consider funerals of members of the imperial family. Any critical questioning of the material itself, therefore, can bring the realisation that our understanding is rudimentary; that is, what we might believe is common practice or belief is actually based on scant evidence or assumptions made through passing references in our texts.⁴

Such an acknowledgement of the state of our evidence brings us to a discussion of what will be discussed in this chapter. As ever with discussions about death, and also the Roman emperors, I need to strictly delineate what I will discuss. The focus here is clear: I will be discussing the deaths and funerals of emperors and how they were experienced by mourners and participants. Though the question of the emperor’s deification and his subsequent memory and commemoration are all valid and fruitful subjects, my intervention trains strictly on the *sensory* experience that comes out from participating in imperial funerals.⁵ Though I cannot be exhaustive, my

³ For an overview of how death is understood in Rome, see Louise Cilliers and François P. Retief, ‘Burial Customs and the Pollution of Death in Ancient Rome: Procedures and Paradoxes’, *Acta theologica*, 26 (2006), pp. 128–46; Valerie M. Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2007); Valerie M. Hope, *Roman Death: The Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 65–96, and Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, pp. 217–26.

⁴ Cf. Servius, *Commentary on the Aeneid* 3.64 and 11.143, for the evidence of fear of death pollution, with Allison L. C. Emmerson, ‘Re-examining Roman Death Pollution’, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 110 (2020), p. 10, for analysis. Cf. Hope, *Roman Death*, pp. 93–94 for the wide range of evidence on Roman death.

⁵ On the question of the emperor’s deification, see Javier Arce, *Funus Imperatorum: Los funerales de los emperadores romanos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988), ch. 3; Elias J. Bickerman, ‘Consecratio’, *Entretiens sur l’antiquité classique*, 19 (1973), pp. 3–25; Alessandra Bravi, ‘Immaginario dell’apoteosi e politiche imperiali a Roma tra Cesare e i Flavi’, in *Mors omnibus instat: aspectos arqueológicos, epigráficos y rituales de la muerte en el Occidente romano*, ed. by Javier Andreu Pintado et al. (Madrid: Liceus, 2011), pp. 143–58; and Fernando Lozano, ‘Emperor Worship and Greek Leagues: The Organization of Supra-Civic Imperial Cult in the Roman East’, in *Empire and Religion:*

discussion will analyse instances where the sensory details in the experience of an emperor's death are accentuated in public funerals. The idea is to emphasise the participatory aspect of imperial death rituals, which, through the actions of the participants, provide historians with evidence of the perception of death.

I want to stress something rather specific: the *sensory detail* of the experience accompanying the death and burial of Roman emperors.⁶ I argue that the description of various senses in and around the funeral can tell us a great deal about how Romans experienced the death of the Roman emperor. It is noteworthy that a heightened attention to the senses accompanies the death ritual, which stresses the liminality between life and death, and the partaking in viewing the body, the open mourning, the playing of music, the eating of food, the placement of flowers, and the burning of incense all suggest an importance placed on experiences of life itself.

Posed alternatively, 'we have to try to understand what Romans felt, and that is very difficult'.⁷ This difficulty is compounded by the disparate

Religious Change in Greek Cities under Roman Rule, ed. by Elena Muñiz Grijalvo et al., Impact of Empire 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 149–76, on names and definitions for *divi* and *theoi Sebastoi*. The commemoration (and damnation) of emperors has been given ample coverage in scholarship and it touches on the afterlife of an emperor, which is a tangential topic. Dario Calomino, *Defacing the Past: Damnation and Desecration in Imperial Rome* (London: Spink Books, 2016); Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Penelope J. E. Davies, *Death and the Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010); Harriet I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 235–75; Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, ch. 5; Shushma Malik, *The Nero-Antichrist: Founding and Fashioning a Paradigm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Eric R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Cf. the role of commemoration in Roman burials in Maureen Carroll, 'Death and Society: Social and Economic Aspects of Death in the Roman World', in *Mors omnibus instat: Aspectos arqueológicos, epigráficos y rituales de la muerte en el Occidente romano*, ed. by Javier Andreu Pintado et al. (Madrid: Liceus, 2011), pp. 24–30.

⁶ Cf. Mario Erasmio, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2008), p. 10, for a similar approach that stresses the experience, though Erasmio focuses on performance in death rituals. For a multisensory reading of Roman history, particularly to the experience of social and domestic life in the Roman house, see Hannah Platts, *Multisensory Living in Ancient Rome: Power and Space in Roman Houses* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), esp. ch. 1 on the methodology of interpreting senses from our evidence, and ch. 3, which importantly notices the noteworthy sensory details in funeral contexts, including that during Germanicus' death, discussed below.

⁷ Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, p. 218.

nature of our evidence and our inability to know the minds of those Romans in the throes of their grief. However, the participation in ritual and the outpouring of sensory experience in communal settings all speak to an attachment to an experience of death that was meant to be public and communal, which makes the public actions in themselves the historian's best chance to access how people *reimagined* life through death and, in turn, reimagined death through life in how people performed momentous transitions such as the death of a monarch. Taking the concept of 'belief acts' from Bruno Latour, articulated succinctly by John H. Arnold in his study of medieval religious history, we see that religious speech and action are performative in the sense that religion is articulated in a public setting, and also risky in the sense as they articulate a hope and encounter that might ultimately fail; namely, that the deceased person's legacy might live on.⁸ That hope is articulated through ritual surrounding the decease of a person that explore the lines between life and death, the human and the divine, which makes such an activity a religious act.

Arnold articulates this phenomenon in this way: 'in the possibility of failure, in the effort required to sustain something which reaches beyond the present moment (whether understood as individual and interiorized, or as more collective and publicly enacted).'⁹ Put more concretely with an example from Tacitus about a figure of prominence in the present chapter, Germanicus becomes the subject of such a risky act in the context of his triumph (a religious ceremony that sees the victorious general being driven in a chariot through the streets of Rome after a successful campaign). The perspective of the Roman people is focalised as they view Germanicus and his five children in the chariot. Their fear is that they, and more specifically he, would not survive into the future, as 'the loves of the Roman people were short and unpropitious' given the examples of Germanicus' father Drusus and uncle Marcellus, who both died young.¹⁰ Here, anxiety over the future is writ large on a public stage and the fear of death is a spectre that looms over the procession. Whether this scene is a foreboding projection by

⁸ John H. Arnold, 'Believing in Belief: Gibbon, Latour and the Social History of Religion', *Past & Present*, 260.1 (2023), pp. 250–51, and Bruno Latour, *Rejoicing, or the Torments of Religious Speech* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), pp. 25–26.

⁹ Arnold, 'Believing in Belief', p. 252.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.41.2: 'However, there hidden was an underlying dread, with them reflecting that the favour of the crowd had hardly been prosperous for his father Drusus, and his uncle was taken away in his youth from the burning desires of the Roman people, and that brief and unpropitious are the loves of the Roman people' (*sed suberat occulta formido, reputantibus haud prosperum in Druso patre eius favorem vulgi, avunculum eiusdem Marcellum flagrantibus plebis studiis intra iuventam ereptum, brevis et infaustos populi Romani amores*).

Tacitus is beside the point, as the contemporary communal outpourings for Germanicus after his death corroborate such feelings.¹¹

The organisation of this paper is as follows. I will take a thematic approach that zooms in on the moments of death, the funerals, and the burials of the two main figures discussed in this paper, Germanicus and Septimius Severus, with relevant comparative material added throughout. In both cases, the body was cremated and brought back to the city: Germanicus was interred at the Mausoleum of Augustus and Septimius Severus at the Mausoleum of Hadrian (Castel Sant'Angelo) by their families, which provide good examples for imperial funerals.¹² The reason for this choice is to focus on the details discussed by our authors and documents – namely, Tacitus, Suetonius, Herodian, and the inscriptions known as *Tabula Siarensis* and the *Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre* – rather than creating categories of what might be the norm for any given aspect of Roman death rituals.¹³ The choice of these two figures works as a jumping-off point to discuss relevant comparative evidence of other imperial funeral rituals in the first two centuries of our era. The stress lies firmly on the experiential moments of these death rituals and what the supply of sensory details might tell us about Roman views on death and on commemoration in their world, and, in particular, with figures as prominent as the Roman emperor.

Through such examples, we can attempt to reconstruct ideas about death and its aftermath. The approach taken here is to stress the senses in these acts: it may be challenging to answer questions, such as ‘what did Romans think of an afterlife?’ or why any specific ritual was undertaken, but what seems to connect the evidence is close attention to *sensory* detail – the acts experienced by participants in funeral contexts. A notable characteristic of descriptions of death is how *vivid* they are: we are told about sound, smell, appearance, touch, and even taste, thanks to the descriptions of the food that was eaten during funeral rituals. The end of an emperor’s life is accompanied by the experiences that life brings and by a conscious communal wish to commemorate (that) life.

Death and the Emperor

It is noteworthy that the period of mourning alters the rhythms of life; this highlights the impact of the death of significant public figures on society.

¹¹ See *Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre* [SCPP] II.440–49 for the importance of Germanicus to the state and 472–75 for the outpourings of the Roman *plebs*. Cf. *Tabula Siarensis* [TS] II.154–60, for statues being set up of Germanicus on behalf of the Roman *plebs*.

¹² Tacitus, *Annals* 3.4.1; Herodian, *History* 4.1.4.

¹³ This has been done before effectively: see Hope, *Roman Death*.

I start with Germanicus Julius Caesar, who was an illustrious member of the *domus Augusta* in the late Augustan and early Tiberius principates (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.3). Though technically not an emperor, Germanicus was a prominent member of the *domus Augusta*, an illustrious general given extraordinary command, and was politically and socially popular; all necessary ingredients for his unfulfilled role as future emperor and sole ruler (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.33).¹⁴ News of Germanicus' illness was experienced as pain and anger in Rome.¹⁵ On this news, Tacitus describes great grief felt by the province and surrounding people as well as the painful grief (*indoluerē*) of foreign kings and nations.¹⁶ Public rumour overtook any official announcement from the senate and the magistrates, as the people of Rome observed a spontaneous *iustitium* (public mourning) by deserting the fora of the city and closing their houses.¹⁷ Tacitus also takes care to describe the paradoxical sound of this period as the people donned their mourning garb: *passim silentia et gemitus* – 'throughout there was silence and groaning'. Such a reaction fits with the general sense of mourning and chaos that surrounded the death of an imperial favourite.¹⁸ Yearly rhythms, too, were affected by death. As we see in the *Tabula Siarensis*, which outlines the acts of remembrance for Germanicus, annual sacrifices on 10 October were to be held where Germanicus was interred and, on that day, no public business was to be conducted by Roman magistrates or magistrates of *municipia*, Roman and Latin colonies, no marriages or engagements were to be celebrated, there was to be no borrowing or lending of money, or any organisation of public games or entertainment.¹⁹ Corroborating this is the inscription from Pisa describing the honours given to Gaius Caesar, Augustus' adopted son who died during his command post in the east, which also records the annual suspension of public activities, sacrifices,

¹⁴ On Germanicus, see the entry 'Iulius Caesar, Germanicus' in Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For his political prominence and powers, see Frédéric Hurlet, *Les collègues du prince sous Auguste et Tibère: De la légalité républicaine à la légitimité dynastique* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1997), Katie Low, 'Germanicus on Tour: History, Diplomacy and the Promotion of a Dynasty', *Classical Quarterly*, 66.1 (2016), pp. 222–38, and Greg Rowe, *Princes and Political Cultures: The New Tiberian Senatorial Decrees* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.82.1.

¹⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.72.2.

¹⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.82.3. Cf. the Pisan Cenotaph for Gaius Caesar (*CIL* II.1421, II.57–62), which has an official pronouncement that social engagements were suspended, with the extra information that their clothing will have been changed (*veste mutata*).

¹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.82.2 on the rumour of Germanicus' survival that prompted joy from the people at Rome. See Platts, *Multisensory Living in Ancient Rome*, pp. 77–130.

¹⁹ *TS* II.136–46.

and festivities on 21 February.²⁰ So, we can see official pronouncements and spontaneous outpourings synchronising uneasily in our record. Official pronouncements interact with public feeling and the transactions and rhythm of daily life are altered and change with the deaths of emperors and their families. Moreover, the changing of the rhythms of life on a yearly basis means regular reflection on the legacy and memory of the figure in question. Though this may change through time, the dotting of the calendar of various imperial funerals adds to the record of potential reflection on death.²¹

Moving towards the evidence of the funeral itself, both Germanicus (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.75; 3.1.4) and Septimius Severus (Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire* 4.2.3–4) were cremated and were brought to Rome in an urn before being interred in their respective mausoleums.²² In Herodian's description of Severus' cremation, he notes that perfumes were added to the ashes before being placed in an alabaster urn (Herodian, *History* 3.15.7). In a relevant passage of comparative evidence, Pliny the Elder notes the vast quantities of cinnamon and cassia imported from Arabia for use in funeral contexts:

Her (sc. Arabia's) good fortune has been caused by the luxury of mankind even in the hour of death, when they burn over the departed the products which they had originally understood to have been created for the gods. Good authorities declare that Arabia does not produce so large a quantity of perfume in a year's output as was burned by the Emperor Nero in a day at the obsequies of his wife Poppaea. Then reckon up the vast number of funerals celebrated yearly throughout the entire world, and the perfumes such as are given to the gods a grain at a time, that are piled up in heaps to the honour of dead bodies!²³

²⁰ *CIL* II.1421, II.29–33 = J. Bert Lott, *Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 74–75.

²¹ See Christoforou, *Imagining the Roman Emperor*, pp. 181–85, for more on how emperors change time.

²² ἔς τε τὴν Ῥώμην ἠπειγόντο κομίζοντες τὰ τοῦ πατρὸς λείψανα: τὸ γὰρ σωματίον πυρὶ παραδόντες, τὴν τε κόνιν σὺν ἀρώμασιν ἐς κάλπιν ἀλαβάστρου ἐμβαλόντες, ἀπεκόμιζον ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην, ἐς τὰ βασιλέων ἀποθησόμενοι ἱερὰ μνήματα. After burning his body and putting the ashes into an alabaster urn together with perfumes, they accompanied this urn to Rome and placed it in the sacred mausoleum of the emperors. Lucius Septimius Severus, from a mixed Punic and Italian family background from Leptis Magna in Tripolitania, modern Libya, had been a consul and was a senator by the time of the civil war that erupted in the aftermath of Commodus' assassination in 193 CE.

²³ Pliny. *Natural History* 12.83: beatam illam fecit hominum etiam in morte luxuria quae dis intellexerant genita inurentium defunctis. periti rerum adseverant non ferre tantum annuo fetu quantum Nero princeps novissimo Poppaeae suae die concremaverit. aestimentur postea toto orbe singulis annis tot funera, acervatimque congesta

The tension between the exceptionality of this luxury item and the statement of its ubiquitous use is worth pausing on. The excess offering of perfumes, noted here with a moralistic tone by Pliny, is something that both the wider population of the Roman Empire and the emperor himself share, with the difference being the respective quantities and scale. So, there is a dialectic between the common use of perfume *and* its exceptional and specific use in abnormal quantities for Poppaea (who died in 65 CE). Also, the comment on their use in rituals for the gods is also instructive, which connects rituals for the dead with rituals for the gods, however improper it seemed to Pliny. For our purposes, then, perfumes are a tantalising sensory detail that place people at the precipice of the unknown; towards interaction with the gods and death that they cannot see. And the intensity and attention are only heightened for emperors and their family members. So, extraordinary ritual in imperial funerals that is based on common practice.

The public commemoration of both their remains and, in particular, of Septimius Severus' wax effigy during the process of his deification (or apotheosis) also requires comment. Senses imbue these commemorations in Rome. For Germanicus, Tacitus describes the day of internment as one where, at times, there was palpable silence and, at other times, disturbing wailing (Tacitus, *Annals* 3.4.1; cf. *TS*. II. 6–7), evocative in the city where the streets were full of people and the Campus Martius was full of torches (note the depiction of torches surrounding the body on the Tomb of the Haterii, which may suggest their common use across society and their regular use in funereal contexts).²⁴ For Septimius Severus, sights, sounds, and smells permeate our record. Aside from the cremation, a wax model of the emperor was created, which was meant to mimic accurately the body of the deceased (Herodian, *History* 4.2.2). His body lay on an ivory reclining chair, which was placed at the entrance of the imperial palace on the Palatine. There the wax effigy lay in the company of Roman senators dressed in black and Roman *matronae* in mourning garb (Herodian, *History* 4.2.3). Doctors intermittently checked the body as if it were a patient (τὸν νοσοῦντα – lit. one who is ill) and kept an eye on whether it was showing signs of death; a strange activity, though the funeral process for the effigy mirrored the funeral of the actual body. Such an activity therefore suggests it was important to treat the fake as the real thing in the process of the

honori cadaverum quae dis per singulas micas dantur! One suggestion for the inclusion of perfumes is that they would disguise unpleasant odours, see Hope, 'Roman Death', p. 74, pp. 82–83.

²⁴ On the use of torches, see the suggestion of Hope, 'Roman Death', p. 76: 'The presence of the torches may indicate that all funerals were originally held at night, but equally their use may have had symbolic or protective origins, lighting the way of the deceased to the next world or warding off evil spirits.'

deification ritual and also allowed more time to perform the deification ritual without having to consider the decay of the corpse, which would matter if there was a long span of time between the death and the funeral. A relevant comparison comes in the funeral of Pertinax, Severus' predecessor, whose wax effigy was treated as his body since there was a gap between Pertinax's death (28 March 193 CE) and his deification (perhaps 1 June of the same year) as organised by the emperor Septimius Severus: upon this rested an effigy of Pertinax in wax, laid out in triumphal garb; and a comely youth was keeping the flies away from it with peacock feathers, as though it were really a person sleeping.²⁵ The participation in the pageantry of treating the effigy as real seems to be important in the communal affirmation of the sending off and subsequent deification of the deceased emperor, seen in the lamentation over the 'body' by the crowd (Dio 75.5.2: πάντες ἅμα ὠλοφυράμεθα καὶ πάντες ἐπεδακρύσαμεν: at the same time we all wailed and all wept) and the kissing of the effigy before its burning (Dio 75.5.4: καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο τὸ εἶδωλον ὃ τε Σεουῆρος καὶ οἱ συγγενεῖς τοῦ Περτίνακος ἐφίλησαν; and afterwards, Severus and the relatives of Pertinax kissed the effigy).

Returning to Septimius Severus' funeral, once they had announced the death of the effigy (ἐπὶ δὲ δόξῃ τετελευτηκέναι – when it seems that it has passed), members of the equestrian order took it to the Roman forum, where choirs of men and women sang hymns and dirges for the emperor (Herodian, *History* 4.2.6).²⁶ The wax effigy was then brought on its ivory bier to an elaborate funeral pyre on the Campus Martius (Herodian, *History* 4.2.6–9). Of note for our purposes is the osmic quality of the description in the following passage:

ἐς δὴ τὸ οἴκημα τὸ δεῦτερον ἀνακομίσαντες τὴν κλίνην τιθέασιν, ἀρώματά τε καὶ θυμιάματα πάντα ὅσα γῆ φέρει, εἴ τέ τινες καρποὶ ἢ πόαι χυμοὶ τε συμβαλλόμενοι πρὸς εὐωδίαν, ἀνακομίζονται καὶ σωρηδὸν χέονται οὔτε γὰρ ἔθνος οὔτε πόλις τις οὔτε τῶν ἐν ἀξιώσει ἢ τιμῇ ἔστιν ὅς μὴ δῶρα ταῦτα ὕστατα πέμπει φιλοτίμως ἐς τιμὴν τοῦ βασιλέως.

The bier is taken up and placed on the second storey. Every perfume and incense on earth and all the fruits and herbs and juices that are collected for their aroma are brought up and poured out in great heaps. Every

²⁵ Dio 75.4.3: ἐκομίσθη στρώμασι πορφυροῖς καὶ διαχρύσοις κεκοσμημένη, καὶ ἐς αὐτὴν εἶδωλόν τι τοῦ Περτίνακος κήρινον, σκευῆ ἐπινικίῳ εὐθετημένον, ἀνετέθη, καὶ αὐτοῦ τὰς μυίας παῖς εὐπρεπῆς, ὡς δῆθεν καθεύδοντος, πτεροῖς ταῶνος ἀπεσόβει.

²⁶ ἄδουσι δὲ ἑκάτεροι ὕμνους τε καὶ παιᾶνας ἐς τὸν τετελευτηκότα, σεμνῶ μέλει καὶ θρηνώδει ἔρρυθμισμένους. Each choir sings hymns and praises to the deceased, composed with solemn and mournful rhythms.

people and city and prominent person of distinction vies with each other to send these last gifts in honour of the emperor.²⁷

The elaborate nature of this description is notable for the attention to sensory detail and for the participatory aspect of the procession. As with other funerals described in this paper, there is a sense of communal participation in funereal rites and an overly sensitive encounter with the dead ‘body’, as all expense in kind and money is used in honouring the emperor, to the extent of competitiveness. As with the note from Pliny on Poppaea’s funeral discussed above, the funeral process for the emperor is exceptional, though connected to the expenditure of excess produce. Again, we see the people interact with and pour incense, juice, and other substances on the body. Put plainly, the interactions between people and emperor here mimic the same rituals associated with the funeral rituals of the actual body, as seen with the mourners and the doctors looking after the effigy, the public display and procession of the bier, and the burning of food and incense at the pyre. The whole process is experiential and engages the senses; this heightens the feeling of grief and makes the process of mourning one where society as whole directs its attention towards the transition from life to death. The death of an emperor thus becomes part of the rhythm of life and it is to be performed and commemorated, thus evincing a belief act that professes the importance of the emperor to the community both in life and in death.

Vying with the description of Septimius Severus is the account of Sulla’s funeral, the Roman dictator of the late Roman republic who died in 78 BCE. Appian describes the throngs of Roman magistrates, senators, equestrians, and plebeians carrying gilded insignia and silver weaponry, which the author notes are still used to his day in processions. Roman priests and Sulla’s army accompanied the procession (Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.497–98). Trumpeters accompanied the procession in large numbers, adding mournful and nostalgic tunes (Appian, *Wars* 1.499). Though not strictly an emperor, Sulla’s death is notable for a few reasons. Firstly, Appian, a Greek author who wrote in the second century CE, describes Sulla’s funeral with imperial funerals kept firmly in view: Appian notes parallels through reference to funerals of his time, with which he analyses the meaning of Sulla’s funeral through analogy. Secondly, such funeral contexts were times of reflection on the memory and legacy of illustrious figures within Roman society.²⁸ The experience of the spectacle allowed for

²⁷ Herodian, *History* 4.2.8–10.

²⁸ See Flower, *The Art of Forgetting*. For the problems of Sulla’s legacy, see J. Alison Rosenblitt, *Rome after Sulla* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

participatory reflection (Appian, *Wars* 1.499–500). In this case, reflection was on the life lived and what his legacy would be:

ἔς τε γὰρ τὴν ὄψιν τῶν γιγνομένων ἀποβλέποντες καὶ ἐς τὴν μνήμην ὧν ἔδρασεν ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐξεπλήττοντο καὶ ὠμολόγουν τοῖς ἐναντίοις εὐτυχέστατον αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνοις γενέσθαι καὶ σφίσι καὶ τεθνεῶτα φοβερότατον.

As they contemplated the present **spectacle** and the memory of what the man had done, they were astonished and confessed to their neighbours that while he had brought them the highest good fortune, even dead he was still an object of fear to themselves.²⁹

The power that Sulla exercised even in death was palpable and remained in the manifestation of his army (Appian, *Wars* 501).³⁰ Similarly to Augustus and Germanicus, these contexts are subject to talk, rumour, and comparison: in Tacitus' version of both Augustus' and Germanicus' funerals, the author focalises through the Roman people reflections on the deeds of both and how they are compared to others (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.9–10; 3.5–6).³¹ As such, talk seems to be a part of the death of the emperor that is worth re-performing both in monumental bronze and marble as well as in historiography in the future.

A further parallel is worth outlining here to underline the visceral experience of an imperial funeral. Much like the wax effigy of Septimius Severus that was moulded to mimic the body of the emperor on his deathbed, so too was a wax effigy of Julius Caesar moulded after his assassination in 44 BCE. Passion and emotion imbued the scene, as did the sense of spontaneity throughout in the dirges and chants that accompanied the funeral itself (Appian, *Wars* 610). The spontaneity of Caesar's funeral is a common aspect of its transmission to posterity, evincing the hectic atmosphere and the fraught feelings at the end of Caesar's life.³² One notable scene is when the wax effigy is lifted up and staged, as in a play:

²⁹ Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.499.

³⁰ Cf. Herodian, *History* 3.15.3, for the legacy of Septimius Severus given to his sons: victory in civil war, foreign conquest, and a large army.

³¹ Such reflections are corroborated by funerary dedications in inscriptions, where the deeds of the emperors are encomiastically outlined and compared with forebears: *Pisan Cenotaph* 44–54 (for Gaius' deeds and a comparison with his adoptive father Augustus) and *TS* 160–66 (for the emperor Tiberius' poem to Germanicus on his deeds preserved for posterity's sake).

³² Cf. Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 68; Dio, *Roman History* 44.50.1; cf. Cicero, *Philippics* 1.6.; cf. Robert Morstein-Marx, *Julius Caesar and the Roman People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), ch. 9, for Caesar's image up to his assassination.

Ἦδε δὲ αὐτοῖς ἔχουσιν ἤδη καὶ χειρῶν ἐγγύς οὖσιν ἀνέσχε τις ὑπὲρ τὸ λέχος ἀνδρείκελον αὐτοῦ Καίσαρος ἐκ κηροῦ πεποιημένον· τὸ μὲν γὰρ σῶμα, ὡς ὕπιον ἐπὶ λέχους, οὐχ ἔωρᾶτο. τὸ δὲ ἀνδρείκελον ἐκ μηχανῆς ἐπεστρέφετο πάντη, καὶ σφαγαὶ τρεῖς καὶ εἴκοσιν ὄφθησαν ἀνά τε τὸ σῶμα πᾶν καὶ ἀνὰ τὸ πρόσωπον θηριωδῶς ἐς αὐτὸν γενόμεναι. τήνδε οὖν τὴν ὄψιν ὁ δῆμος οἰκτίστην σφίσι φανεῖσαν οὐκέτι ἐνεγκὼν ἀνώμωζάν...

While they were in this mood and already near to violence, somebody raised above the bier an image of Caesar himself made of wax; the body itself, as it lay on its back on the couch, was out of sight. The image was turned round in all directions by a mechanical device, and you could see the 23 wounds savagely inflicted all over his body and face. The people could no longer bear this pitiful sight presented to them.

As the passage outlines, the point of the show was to exhibit the many wounds of Caesar, brought up literally *ex machina* to elicit a response from the onlookers.³³ The spectacle (τὴν ὄψιν) itself heightened the emotions, though it was not of the body itself, but its representation, which was not an idealised or cleaned-up version of Caesar's body, but one that exhibited the stab wounds inflicted on him during his assassination. The fact that you might see and count the number of wounds suggests an active interaction with the body itself, which connects to other instances where interaction with the emperor's effigy is noted. Perhaps these parallels suggest an important part of death ritual being about the interaction with representations of a dead body to elicit an emotional response, and that it was intentional. As such, death is experienced in theatricality that spurs the crowd into violent action (Appian, *Wars* 2.613). Though it might be thought that Caesar's case comes down to the context of his assassination, it is nonetheless a worthwhile comparison to the scenes that we have seen with Germanicus and Septimius Severus, especially in terms of the emotional response and the attention to sensational detail. To reiterate, funerals were encounters with death through the performance of what the joys and pleasures that are enjoyed in life, where the senses were engaged purposefully to elicit visceral and emotional responses. Though it is a challenge to speculate on the meaning of such sensory aspects in the funerals of the emperor, perhaps such a focus on emotional experience to the extent of an active interaction with the body itself creates a tension between the lack of senses in death and

³³ Cf. Robert Morstein-Marx, *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 157–58, for the varied responses of the Roman *plebs* in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination that was 'crystallised' into Caesarian sentiment by the funeral. Cf. Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 68.1.

the senses we experience in life. On this reading, these funerals are a belief act reaffirming the existence of life and its continuation.

Sensory details continued in the aftermath of the burning and subsequent commemoration. At the moment of the burning of Septimius Severus' funeral pyre, which has been built up with the effigy and the added aromatics and unguents, an eagle is released:

ἐκ δὲ τοῦ τελευταίου καὶ βραχυτάτου κατασκευάσματος, ὡσπερ ἀπὸ τινος ἐπάλλξεως, ἀετός ἀφίεται σὺν τῷ πυρὶ ἀνελευσόμενος ἐς τὸν αἰθέρα, ὃς φέρειν ἀπὸ γῆς ἐς οὐρανὸν τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ψυχὴν πιστεύεται ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων· καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν θεῶν θρησκευεται.

Then from the highest and topmost storey an eagle is released, as if from a battlement, and soars up into the sky with the flames, taking the soul of the emperor from earth to heaven, the Romans believe. After that he is worshipped with the rest of the gods.³⁴

The moment of the funeral pyre reaching its height is the moment the eagle is released to soar and rise above the flames. Such an image is corroborated in Pertinax's funeral: 'Then at last the consuls applied fire to the structure, and when this had been done, an eagle flew aloft from it. Thus was Pertinax made immortal.'³⁵ Thus the representation of a deification is meant to be seen and experienced by all, which thus triggers the acceptance of the emperor's divine status and subsequent worship.³⁶

Corroborating representations of deifications express both the potential imagination of an emperor's deification and the reality and unreality of the scene. For our purposes, two illustrative examples will suffice to indicate the centrality of the eagle and the representation of the funeral pyre.³⁷ The

³⁴ Hdn. 4.2.11. For further evidence of eagles and imperial funerals, see Ida Östenberg, 'The Arch of Titus: Triumph, Funeral, and Apotheosis in Ancient Rome', in *The Arch of Titus: From Jerusalem to Rome—and Back*, ed. by S. Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 35.

³⁵ Dio 75.5.5: εἴθ' οὕτως οἱ ὑπατοὶ πῦρ ἐς αὐτὴν ἐνέβαλον. γενομένου δὲ τούτου ἀετός τις ἐξ αὐτῆς ἀνέπτατο. καὶ ὁ μὲν Περτίναξ οὕτως ἠθανάτισθη. Cf. Dio 56.43.3 for Augustus' funeral.

³⁶ Bruno Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 378, and Simon R. F. Price, 'From Noble Funerals to Divine Cult: The Consecration of Roman Emperors', in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. by David Cannadine and Simon R. F. Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 74–76.

³⁷ Other pertinent evidence includes the Belvedere Altar, which depicts a deification scene (see Bridget A. Buxton, 'A New Reading of the Belvedere Altar', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 118.1 (2014), pp. 91–92, for description and images) and the depiction of the deification of Antoninus Pius and Faustina on the Antonine Column base (see R. T. Ridley, 'The Fate of the Column of Antoninus Pius', *Papers of the British School at*

first representation comes from the apotheosis relief on the Arch of Titus, which is located on the Via Sacra in the Forum Romanum in Rome. The relief itself is a small part at the centre of the vault of the archway, and is visible as you walk through the arch looking upwards. Though small, and certainly smaller than the triumphal reliefs on the arch, Östberg has argued that the triumphal theme culminates in the divinisation of Titus (referred to as divine *divo* in the inscription on the attic of the arch – *CIL* VI 945), which makes the journey from his victory over Judaea, subsequent triumph, and deification one narrative thread.³⁸ The sculpture of Titus is front-facing looking straight ahead, with lines on his brow, and is wearing a toga. He is represented behind an eagle with wings stretched out in flight, and though the eagle is badly worn, you can see the grooves of the feathers and its talons outstretched (Figure 10.1). The relief is a representation of Titus' deification: he is riding the eagle to his elevation in the heavens. Moreover, the effect of the viewer having to look straight up towards the sky to see the relief mimics viewing the eagle soaring above the pyre, as we read above in evidence of other imperial funerals. Thus, the experience of viewing the sculpture connects to the experience of seeing the flight of the eagle, allowing the viewer to relive and commemorate Titus' apotheosis.³⁹

The second representation depicts the deification of Sabina Augusta, the wife of the emperor Hadrian, who died in 137 CE, and which survived on the Arch of Portugal in Rome, demolished in the seventeenth century, and now is in the Capitoline Museums (Figure 10.2). The top half of the relief shows a woman looking in half-profile, who is holding a veil with her right hand as she is being carried by an eagle-winged female Genius holding a torch with flame. Both are rising above a plinth with a depiction of raging flames. On the bottom half of the relief are three figures: the emperor seated on the right with his right arm extended and index finger pointing upwards; a draped man stands behind the emperor in profile; and a third figure on the bottom left is half-dressed looking up at the emperor and the scene with his back to the viewer.⁴⁰ Much like the depiction of Titus, Sabina is being taken to the heavens as a sign of her deification. For our purposes, we share the view of the other figures in the bottom-half of the relief, with a tension of focus between the emperor and the depiction

Rome, 86 (2018), pp. 236–37, for description and images). Cf. Östberg, 'The Arch of Titus', p. 41 n. 16.

³⁸ Östberg, 'The Arch of Titus', pp. 34–35.

³⁹ Östberg, 'The Arch of Titus', p. 35: 'We, the spectators, view the equipage from below, having to turn our head and gaze upward in order to follow the emperor's journey from the earthly domain to that of the gods.'

⁴⁰ Terry C. Brennan, *Sabina Augusta: An Imperial Journey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 177–78, and 180–91 for a discussion of her death and relationship with Hadrian.



Figure 10.1: The Apotheosis of Titus panel, Arch of Titus, c. 81 CE, Rome (Forum Romanum) (Stefano Valeri / Alamy Stock Photo).

of Sabina's apotheosis. Again, we are invited with the seated figure on the bottom left to observe the deification and the presiding emperor in awe, which underlines the tensions between life and death as discussed throughout this paper. The seated figure can therefore represent participants in imperial funerals.

Other evidence also suggests the continuation of commemorations of death. On inscriptions, we read of the offering of food at the tomb, including the pouring of libations, the laying of flowers, and the partaking in ritual dining at the burial site.⁴¹ Though not in the context of an imperial funeral per se, an instructive though subversive example of such dining comes from

⁴¹ *ILS* 8370, 8374. For more evidence, see J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 62–63 n. 255, and for the evidence of roses placed on graves, see *CIL* V.4015 = *ILS* 6711, where money was given to cover customary meals and roses.



Figure 10.2: The Apotheosis of Sabina. Panel from the Arco di Portogallo 138 CE: Rome (Palazzo dei Conservatori, Musei Capitolini, inv. MC1213) (Stefano Valeri / Alamy Stock Photo).

Cassius Dio's description of Domitian's 'dinner of death'. Though Dio's focus trains directly on the power dynamics of the archetypal tyrant toying with his guests' future safety (Dio 68.9.3: As a result, each and every one of them were afraid and trembling – ὥστε καὶ φοβεῖσθαι καὶ τρέμειν καθ' ἕκαστον αὐτῶν πάντα),⁴² the focus on the *common* aspects of rituals to do

⁴² For analysis of the power dynamics, see Catherine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 163–65; Mary Beard, *Emperor of*

with dining and commemoration at tombs is worth underlining. Domitian invited members of the senate and the equestrian order to dinner in a dining room that was black on all sides; on the walls, ceiling and floor (Dio 68.9.1). The guests were instructed to come alone, and Domitian set up the room as follows:

καὶ πρῶτον μὲν στήλην ταφοειδῆ ἐκάστῳ σφῶν παρέστησε, τό τε ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἔχουσαν καὶ λυχνούχον μικρόν, οἷος ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις κρεμάννυται ἔπειτα παῖδες εὐπρεπεῖς γυμνοί, μέλανι καὶ αὐτοὶ κεχρισμένοι, ἐσηλθον ὥσπερ εἶδωλα, καὶ περιελθόντες αὐτοὺς μετ' ὀρχήσεώς τινος φοβεράς πρὸ ποδῶν ἰδρῦθησαν· καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο πάνθ' ὅσαπερ ἐν τοῖς ἐναγίσμασι καθαγίζεται, καὶ ἐκείνοις μέλανα ἐν σκεύεσιν ὁμοίοις προσηνέχθη.

And first he placed next to each of them a grave marker-like slab, on which was the guest's name and also a small lamp, just like those that hang in tombs. Next good-looking naked boys, also painted black, entered like ghosts, and after encircling the guests in an awe-inspiring dance took up their stations at their feet. After this all the things that are commonly offered at the sacrifices to departed spirits were likewise set before the guests, all of them black and in dishes of a similar colour.

Such a description shows a played-up encounter of sensory experiences as it may be imagined to have been experienced by the deceased themselves.⁴³ The action to paint everything black simultaneously accentuates the sensory deprivation of death in the fact you may not see anything, but also the experience of ritual activity itself that may take place at your grave, which here included the inscription of a grave marker, the placement of small lamps, and the offering of food to the departed spirits.⁴⁴ Though no doubt terrifying and macabre, the experience is that of dining with the dead and dining as the dead in the presence of emperor, who was himself alone speaking in complete silence of his guests just as if they were already among the departed (Dio 68.9.4: *σιωπῆ πολλῇ ὥσπερ ἐν τεθνηκόσιν ἤδη ἦν*), and

Rome (London: Profile Books, 2023), pp. 83–84; and Jean-Michel Hulls, 'Building Meaning: Constructions of Imperial Power in Domitianic Architecture, Visual Culture, and Literary Sources', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 44.2 (2019), p. 288. For the dynamics of fear, see Verena Schulz, 'Historiography and Panegyric: The Deconstruction of Imperial Representation in Cassius Dio', in *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*, ed. by H. L. Lange and J. M. Madsen (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 287–88.

⁴³ For a sensory reading, see Platts, *Multisensory Living in Ancient Rome*, pp. 157–60, which focuses on the sensory aspects of dining here rather than what it means for our understanding of the experience.

⁴⁴ Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*, pp. 164–67, for more evidence on the connection of death and dining in ancient Rome.

dilating on death and execution (Dio 68.9.4). The emperor performs here as a mediator between life and death, which justifies the fear of his guests and Dio's framing of this scene. However, placing the power dynamics to the side for a moment, death is inextricably connected to dining, which underlines the importance of eating in such contexts, evinced by Dio's insistence on the common trappings of commemoration in this scene.⁴⁵ This sadistically playful scene is instructive in reconstructing a thought-world where the dead can encounter the living in the sorts of activity that life brings, such as dance and eating, all under the direction of the emperor, whether dead or alive.

As a final note, such activities could continue after the death of emperors. An example of this sort of ritual comes from a short note by Suetonius: 'There were even those who for a long time decorated his [Nero's] tomb with spring and summer flowers' (*Et tamen non defuerunt qui per longum tempus vernis aestivisque floribus tumulum eius ornarent*).⁴⁶ In the context of death and memory, the senses continued to be mentioned.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the sensory aspects with which to view the death of Roman emperors as experienced by those around them. The death of emperors was experienced through public activities that involved people across all levels of society and, from our evidence, these funerals were all-encompassing sensory experiences that elicited emotional responses from the participants. Such rituals were fundamental not only from the perspective of the state, which wanted to commemorate an illustrious individual, such as an emperor, but also from the perspective of the wider public, since these rituals were predicated on its participation to make the commemoration meaningful to participants in the rituals themselves. These rare occasions give us a glimpse of visceral reactions to death, which suggests that the public commemoration of such figures consisted of belief acts that both underlined the importance of the Roman emperor to the community and guaranteed his elevated position in society. In other words, such an overwhelmingly marked experience of death displayed a Roman emperor's greatness, which he exhibited in his life.

The Roman emperor was a public figure who loomed large over the lives of his subjects and, as a ruler, he was expected to be seen and encountered as accessible to a wider public. Though elevated due to his position in society, the Roman people expected to be engaged publicly throughout an emperor's life, thus making him a regular presence in their

⁴⁵ Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*.

⁴⁶ Suetonius, *Life of Nero* 57.2.

lives.⁴⁷ The death of an emperor would have been an opportunity, then, to experience his life and to reflect on his memory into the future through subsequent commemorations and memorials in stone. Interactions with the wax effigy meant that the public could view the effects of his deterioration and death and, in a sense, experience those feelings with the emperor. Death was therefore imagined as a communal experience in which one could discuss the lives of the deceased and experience their lives through stories and the communal rituals of feasting, processions, and the burning of aromatics. Death, therefore, was imagined through act and speech, and through these actions, we can map the thought-world surrounding death in antiquity that forms a useful comparison with other imaginations of death across the ancient world. In Rome, death imagined altered the rhythms of life, with calendars dotted with yearly commemorations of imperial deaths. The death of an emperor was therefore imagined communally through sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch.

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⁴⁷ There is no space to discuss this aspect of the emperor's reception here. See Christoforou, *Imagining the Roman Emperor*.

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Chapter 11

Imagining the Afterlife in the Psalms: The Episode of Mitchell Dahood and His Commentary

Christopher B. Hays

To speak of how death is imagined is to speak of an interplay between the way it was imagined in antiquity and how it has been imagined in more recent scholarship. Ancient imaginations were more diverse than is sometimes recognised, and modern perceptions have fluctuated greatly over the decades.

In the Hebrew Bible, the sub-field of Psalms scholarship finds itself today in a surprising place: there is something approaching a consensus that a belief in the afterlife is not really attested in the Psalms, or at least not in its early layers. This is surprising because not only does it make monarchic Judah a stark exception in its Iron Age Levantine context, in which dead kings were commonly thought to rise and feast with the gods, but also it is inconsistent with some of the earliest interpretive traditions attested for the Psalms (e.g. *m. Sanh.* 10; Acts 2:24–32).¹

Yet it is difficult to find a recent critical commentary on Psalms that so much as seriously entertains the idea that the psalmists were writing about the afterlife. How did this happen – this death of afterlife in Psalms scholarship? How did we come to the point that it is the norm for theologians and even historical-critical scholars to state that monarchic Israel did not have a belief in the afterlife or the powers of the dead, and to argue that language about rising from the dead is merely figurative or hyperbolic when early, and the mark of a very late text when it cannot be explained away?

There are a number of different answers to that question; I intend to present a fuller account of the story as part of a larger project elucidating the role of certain early Psalms in the Judahite royal ancestor cult. For the

¹ *m. Sanh.* 10 cites Pss 1:5 and 50:5 for the resurrection; Acts 2:24–32 quotes Ps 16:8–10; cf. Rashi on Ps 17:15 and Radak on Ps 16:10–11.

present purpose, I would like to focus on the most notorious recent episode in this debate: the story of Mitchell J. Dahood and his Anchor Bible Psalms commentary – a commentary so infamous that its use is banned in exegesis courses taught by at least one leading Hebrew Bible scholar. The execution and reception of this commentary are the most significant explanations one can offer for the death of the afterlife in Psalms scholarship.

Scholarly views often swing on a pendulum of fashion and, to some degree, this has been true of views about the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible. A more complete account would begin with the early comparative excitement of the late nineteenth century, when scholars began to hypothesise a more extensive belief in the powers of the dead on the part of biblical authors.² It would include the mid-twentieth-century excitement about a common pattern in ancient Near Eastern ideas about divine kingship.³ And it would run up against a strong strain of critical scholarship in about the same period that asserted the distinctiveness of ancient Israelite religion in many respects, including with respect to its lack of a belief in the afterlife.

² N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *La cité antique* (Paris: Durand, 1864); E. Spiess, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Vorstellungen vom Zustande nach dem Tode auf Grund vergleichender Religionsforschung* (Jena: Hermann Costenoble, 1877); Friedrich Schwally, *Das Leben nach dem Tode nach den Vorstellungen des alten Israel und des Judentums einschließlich des Volksglaubens im Zeitalter Christi: Eine biblisch-theologische Untersuchung* (Giessen: J. Ricker'sche, 1892); Adolphe Lods, *La croyance à la vie future et le culte des morts dans l'antiquité Israélite* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1906); George Margoliouth, 'Ancestor-Worship and Cult of the Dead (Hebrew)', in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. by James Hastings, 12 vols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 1, pp. 444–50; Paul Torge, *Seelenglaube und Unsterblichkeitshoffnung im Alten Testament* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909); Lewis B. Paton, 'The Hebrew Idea of the Future Life. I. Earliest Conceptions of the Soul', *The Biblical World*, 35 (1910), pp. 8–20. For overviews of this early period, see Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986), pp. 25–85; Richard C. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, with an Appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription*, SBLWAW 11 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2015), pp. 1–9.

³ Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1943); Norman H. Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival* (London: SPCK, 1947); Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948); Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Die Königsherrschaft Gottes im Alten Testament*, BHT 13 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1951); Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1955); Geo Widengren, *Sakrales Königtum im Alten Testament und im Judentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1955); S. H. Hooke, *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958); Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien II: Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie* (Amsterdam: Schippers, 1966); Edward Lipinski, *La royauté de Yahwé dans la poésie et le culte de l'ancien Israël*, 2nd edn (Brussels: Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1968).

This approach was especially prominent among the Protestant Christian interpreters who dominated the biblical studies guild,⁴ but it was also characteristic of the highly influential Yehezkel Kaufmann.⁵ To this way of thinking, Israel and Judah were unlike all the surrounding powers and nations, in which elites⁶ hoped to live on and feast on offerings alongside the gods; there was a stern acceptance that death was the end of life, that everyone went to Sheol, that offerings were not to be made to the dead, nor were the dead believed to have power. This view is not incomprehensible as the outcome of a desire to read the biblical literature systematically, nor is it always associated with a religious project; but in the end, by its very nature as an effort to clarify less clear passages in scripture by the more clear ones, it is an exercise in biblical theology, dogmatics, and ultimately apologetics.⁷

The argument for Israelite distinctiveness concerning the afterlife in the Psalms was crystallised in Christoph Barth's still-influential *Die Errettung vom Tode in den Individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments*.⁸ In it, he recognised mythical language akin to that of other ANE cultures, but argued that their myths were demythologised in the Old Testament. When it came to death and afterlife, 'Necromancy, belief in souls and veneration of ancestors are at best tolerated here; they find fundamental rejection on the part of *Yahwism*. With it, it first becomes clear that no continuation of life awaits mankind after death.'⁹ As with many interpreters of the era, he

⁴ e.g. G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM, 1957); Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1962). This strand of 'exceptionalist' interpretation has been continued in recent years by, for example, Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002) and John Goldingay, 'Death and Afterlife in the Psalms', in *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part 4. Death, Life After Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity*, ed. by Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 61–85.

⁵ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. by Moshe Greenberg (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

⁶ I specify this to make the claim more modest; the Iron Age data are mostly from elite sources by their nature. But see below on the 'democratisation of death' – the theory that only elites aspired to an afterlife is probably incorrect and based on the limitations of the sources.

⁷ I think here of the interpretive principle of the Westminster Confession, that 'when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly'. This assumes that the meaning of the Bible is unitary and monologic; when in reality the Bible is a compilation of quite diverse voices.

⁸ Christoph Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode in den Individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments* (Basel: Evangelischer Verlag Zollikon, 1947).

⁹ Barth, *Die Errettung*, p. 13, emphasis added: 'Totenbeschwörung, Seelenglaube und Ahnenverehrung fristen hier ein höchstens geduldetes Dasein; vonseiten dies Jahwismus

equated Yahwism with the sum of canonical, biblical texts; this was the dominant way in which Israelite religion was imagined among mid-century scholars.

Dahood arguably set to work at a propitious moment, then – because the assembled, unruly data of archaeology and texts from Israel and beyond do not actually comfortably support the conclusion of Israelite distinctiveness with regard to death and afterlife.¹⁰ No sooner had Barth published his negative assessment than the Ugaritic texts began to be published, launching a new wave of conversation about how Israelite religion related to its context.

Ugarit was tempting. Whereas comparisons to Mesopotamian or Egyptian literature had to be justified with regard to how the ideas had bridged the cultural, linguistic, and geographical gaps to reach Israel and Judah, Ugarit was recognised as inhabiting the same sphere in all those ways, albeit in an earlier period. While many scholars imagined Ugarit as representative of the Baal-worshipping Canaanites of the Bible, others saw in their religious texts a genealogical relationship with later biblical literature. At an extreme were comments such as H. L. Ginsberg's: 'The Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts are to be regarded as one literature.'¹¹

Dahood was part of the first generation of scholars who absorbed the impact of Ugaritic literature from the beginning of their careers. Beginning from a PhD at Johns Hopkins under W. F. Albright (completed in 1951), Dahood quickly began issuing forth a stream of publications, mostly on Ugaritic and biblical comparative topics. By 1956, he was ensconced in a relatively influential professorship at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, and his earlier works became the foundation for the Anchor Bible Psalms commentary, which appeared in three volumes between 1965 and 1970. He was not the first or only one arguing at the time for intimations of afterlife in the Psalms, as the sparse notes in the commentary reflect; he was in fairly good company with the likes of senior luminaries such as Albright and Marvin Pope. But the commentary collected the existing proposals and augmented them. It made him the champion for the view that, as he put it, 'a deep and steady belief in resurrection and immortality permeates the Psalter'.¹²

finden sie grundsätzliche Ablehnung. Bei ihm wird zuerst deutlich, daß den Menschen nach dem Tode keine Fortsetzung des Lebens erwartet.'

¹⁰ Christopher B. Hays, 'How Many Histories of Death Does the Hebrew Bible Contain?', *CBQ*, 81.4 (2019), pp. 679–92.

¹¹ H. L. Ginsberg, 'The Ugaritic Texts and Textual Criticism', *JBL*, 62 (1943), p. 109. A similar view is endorsed by Mitchell Dahood (e.g. 'The Value of Ugaritic for Textual Criticism', *Biblica*, 40 (1959), pp. 160–70) despite his awareness of the need for caution: see *Psalms I: 1–50*, AB 16 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), p. xx.

¹² Dahood, *Psalms I*, p. xli.

Dahood's career, its impact, and its reception are recounted well elsewhere,¹³ but here I offer a more extensive analysis of his work on afterlife in the Psalms, and the reactions to it.

To the relatively learned laypeople and clergy who picked up Dahood's *Psalms I* in 1965, the presentation of afterlife in the Psalms must have struck like a bolt from the blue – if they did not miss the introduction's brief discussion of it entirely. Tucked under the heading 'Biblical Theology', it filled barely half a page. He began, 'Perhaps the most significant contribution to biblical theology that flows from the translations based on the new philological principles concerns the subject of resurrection and immortality.' After calling attention to a dozen passages,¹⁴ he tersely opined that 'the opinion of Sigmund Mowinckel that "neither Israel nor early Judaism knew of a faith in any resurrection nor is such a faith represented in the psalms" will not survive serious scrutiny'.¹⁵

Just before this, a footnote to his more general comments on Levantine and biblical religions is revealing. He wrote: 'The relationship between the biblical writers and the Canaanite poets from whom they borrowed is analogous to that existing between Christian Rome and Pagan Rome';¹⁶ and he cites G. K. Chesterton: 'Christian Rome boasts of being built on Pagan Rome, of surmounting and transcending, but also of preserving it'.¹⁷ Thus, for Dahood, biblical religion superseded Ugaritic religion but also preserved its heritage. And although scholars today might find the term 'biblical religion' questionable, it fits Dahood, because there is very little sense of inner-biblical diversity or diachronic change in his writing about the topic.

In his analysis, Dahood moved directly from Ugarit to the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament without ever stopping to analyse the Iron Age material, especially the tomb architecture and funerary inscriptions. He did nod to foreign concepts, but without any thick description, and the hasty comparative moves meant that his categories were a bit skewed towards the latest and fullest exemplars of afterlife beliefs: those from Greco-Roman antiquity, including the New Testament. A prime example is his use of the term 'resurrection': the dead were thought to rise in various ways across many ancient cultures, long before a doctrine of resurrection emerged in

¹³ Mark S. Smith, *Untold Stories: The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), pp. 144–46, 159–64.

¹⁴ Pss 1:3–6; 5:9; 11:7; 16:10–11; 17:15; 21:7; 27:13; 36:9–10; 37:37–38; 41:13; 56:14; 73:23–24.

¹⁵ Dahood, *Psalms I*, p. xxxv, citing Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1, p. 240.

¹⁶ Dahood, *Psalms I*, p. xxxv n. 26.

¹⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1930), p. 125.

Judaism and Christianity, so this term needs significant qualification and discussion.¹⁸ He never clarified his use of the term ‘resurrection’, defined what exactly it meant for the psalmists, or argued for a complex historical development.

Dahood’s discussions of individual psalms were as terse as his introduction. His comment on Ps 1 is representative: ‘The proposed exegesis assumes a rather advanced concept of resurrection and immortality, but there is ample basis in the Psalter for this supposition.’¹⁹ His exegetical analyses usually included no more than a few lines of assertion. As another example, of Ps 16 he says only this by way of overview:

This profession of faith was composed by a Canaanite convert to Yahwism. Verse 2 contains the *professio fidei*, vss. 3–4 are the abjuration of the false Canaanite gods he once served, while vss. 5–11 enumerate the joys and blessings which issue from this newly found faith in Yahweh. Verses 10–11 are a statement of the poet’s belief in immortality, a doctrine well known among the Canaanites. His union with Yahweh will be eternal.

The rest of the commentary on Ps 16 is almost exclusively comprised of philological and linguistic notes. Regardless of what may have been useful in this new interpretation, it is not surprising that it was unconvincing when presented in such a terse fashion. As John F. Healey later lamented, Dahood ‘paid little attention to setting his philological suggestions in a wider context, so as to show that they were plausible as well as possible.’²⁰ The conclusions must have seemed so obvious to Dahood as to require little explanation.

Dahood himself recognised that he had produced an unusual piece of work. In his introduction to the first volume, he wrote that ‘The present work is not a commentary on the Psalms in the traditional sense of the word; a better term would perhaps be a prolegomenon to a commentary.’²¹ He went on to explain that the commentary is essentially a comparative philological study of the Psalms and Ugaritic literature, to the exclusion of ‘topics usually treated in a Psalms commentary.’²² Presumably, the excitement surrounding the Ugaritic literature contributed to the editorial haste to publish the volume in its sketchy condition.²³

¹⁸ Dahood, *Psalms I*, pp. 4–5.

¹⁹ Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah*, FAT 79 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), p. 55.

²⁰ John F. Healey, ‘The Immortality of the King: Ugarit and the Psalms’, *Or*, 53.2 (1984), p. 245.

²¹ Dahood, *Psalms I*, p. xvii.

²² Dahood, *Psalms I*, p. xvii.

²³ Some sense of this is given by the posthumous comments of the series editor,

In *Psalms III*, Dahood dedicated slightly more introduction space – 12 pages – to the question of ‘Death, Resurrection, and Immortality’.²⁴ But much of it is still the same piecemeal approach, pointing to this and that passage sequentially: *Look at this! Look at that!* And in the end it appears that he recognised the inadequacy of his argumentation, saying: ‘The new readings and analyses – grammatical and prosodic – disclose numerous concepts, motifs, and attitudes that require a more thorough and systematic treatment than is feasible here.’²⁵

Dahood’s Detractors

In *Psalms III*, Dahood also took the somewhat unusual step of quoting a number of his critics’ reviews of the first two volumes. A couple of them bear repeating. Samuel Sandmel, who had famously warned against ‘Parallelomania’ in his SBL Presidential Address of 1961,²⁶ wrote:

I have personally suspected that there has been something wrong in the interpretation of Scripture which has assumed that immortality or resurrection awaited the very late post-exilic period to be expressed, and I am not startled by Dahood’s statement that after-life is demanded by the context. What I am puzzled by is the absence of any significant excursus by him in the book to justify this remarkable shift in scholarly appraisal. He touches on the matter, as one can see from the Index, in the words Afterlife, Immortality, and Resurrection. But I am aghast at his procedure in handling the matter ...²⁷

This comment is telling, as the reaction of a sympathetic interpreter: Sandmel was ready to believe Dahood’s basic argument, but found it so poorly presented that it actually hurt the case.

The weaknesses of the critical responses to his theory also seem much more clear than they must have at the time. One problem with the conversation is that both Dahood and his critics were implicitly reading the Psalter and the Hebrew Bible as a confessional text, to be read holistically (i.e. more or less synchronically) as a source of doctrine. That is to say, they are often asking ‘what the Old Testament says about X’ instead of excavating the

D. N. Freedman, ‘Mitchell Dahood 1922–1982, in *Memoriam*’, *BA*, 45 (1982), pp. 185–87: ‘The results were astounding. I was perhaps better prepared than most for what came from Mitchell’s desk to mine in those years ...’

²⁴ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III: 101–50*, AB 17A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), pp. xli–lii.

²⁵ Dahood, *Psalms III*, p. lii.

²⁶ Samuel Sandmel, ‘Parallelomania’, *JBL*, 81.1 (1962), pp. 1–13.

²⁷ Samuel Sandmel, *Central Conference of American Rabbis*, 15 (1968), p. 90.

diverse historical layers of the Hebrew Bible. Dahood refers to ‘doctrinal and spiritual treasures ... hidden in the Psalter’.²⁸ And D. A. Robertson wrote in *JBL* that ‘Dahood comes up with some really wild interpretations, many of which concern *very important theological matters* (like the question to what extent the concept of immortality is present in the Psalter).’²⁹ Presumably its presence or absence was ‘very important’ because it was a matter central to faith and to the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. I do not mean to suggest that Dahood or his critics were unaware of the Psalter’s development – only that they were prone, in practice, to let it slip out of view.

There is a particular lack of clarity about the kind of afterlife that Dahood was arguing for in the Psalms: was he talking about Iron Age beliefs, or about the Jewish and Christian doctrines of the resurrection and afterlife? In *Psalms III*, Dahood objected that his commentary was simply ‘seeking ... to elucidate the meaning of Hebrew terms in view of the earlier Ugaritic pagan usage’.³⁰ But this is not quite true. Although Dahood made frequent references to Semitic myth and culture, his repeated use of terms such as ‘Elysian Fields’ defines whatever the Psalms are doing by use of a foreign concept.³¹ And as noted above, his use of a term such as ‘resurrection’ without qualification was an overreach that opened up not only critiques, but also conversations about later dogmatic issues.

The determination to see Jewish and Christian afterlife beliefs as superior to and incomparable with those of their contexts motivated Bruce Vawter’s early (and oft-cited) critique of Dahood. He wrote that ‘most of Israel’s history was played out in a society which had eschewed this yearning [for immortality]’ and that the story of necromancy in 1 Sam 28 ‘is an isolated example from popular syncretism of what was kept out of the mainstream of Israelite thought and speculation by the tradition reflected in such texts as Isa 8:19; Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:11’.³² And this was ‘testimony to a superior dynamic inherited from the OT, another instance of what G. Ernest Wright has meant in characterizing the OT as the church’s bulwark against paganism’.³³ So it is assumed here that Israelite religion existed in a ‘pure’ form that was free of pagan practices (rather than that this is an effect created within the canon by the extensive scribal

²⁸ Dahood, *Psalms III*, p. vi.

²⁹ D. A. Robertson, ‘Review of Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, AB 16 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965)’, *JBL*, 85 (1966), p. 484 (emphasis added).

³⁰ Dahood, *Psalms III*, p. xliii.

³¹ So already Bruce Vawter, ‘Intimations of Immortality and the Old Testament’, *JBL*, 91.2 (1972), p. 169.

³² Vawter, ‘Intimations’, p. 170; citing G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts*, SBT 8 (London: SCM, 1952), p. 19.

³³ Vawter, ‘Intimations’, p. 171.

formation by Deuteronomistic, Priestly, and other editors), that the religion described by the Hebrew Bible is superior to other religions, and that its most important role is its function for the Christian church. '[O]ne of the OTs primary values' was in shaping 'later eschatological right-thinking'³⁴ – i.e. orthodoxy. As Vawter's quotation of Wright might have led us to suspect, we have left the sphere of historical and comparative religions and entered the sphere of theology. These are confessional rather than historical claims.

As a further example, we might take a more recent essay by John Goldingay, a relatively thorough and even-handed (and negative) assessment of the question of afterlife in the Psalms. Although the depth of its analysis makes it significant, ultimately it falls into much the same traps as Vawter. One of the reasons that Goldingay says the Psalms must not have referred to the afterlife is that 'it seems implausible that the compilers of the Psalter would have encouraged such expectations' ... 'hopes for which there is no evidence'.³⁵ He is speaking of the idea of a beatific afterlife with God in Heaven, and the former comment is aimed specifically at Dahood's theory that the Psalmists (e.g. in Ps 49) hoped to be 'taken' up to heaven like Enoch or Elijah. This is indeed a weak point in Dahood's argument, but it does not undermine the case for royal afterlife hopes more generally. The afterlife envisioned by Davidic kings was at least partially real and demonstrable: the kings really did hope to 'dwell in the house of the Lord forever' (Ps 23:6), resting in peace in tombs by the Temple in much the same way as Egyptian pharaohs of the same period were buried in temple precincts (and as some English royalty dwell in their sarcophagi even today in Windsor Chapel).

Goldingay goes on to quote a comment by A. F. Kirkpatrick from 1902 that was also cited by Dahood. Kirkpatrick wrote that the modern reader is in danger of error because 'reading these passages in the light of fuller revelation we may easily assign to them a more precise meaning than their original authors and hearers understood. They adapt themselves so readily to Christian hope that we are easily led to believe that it was there from the first.'³⁶ Goldingay agrees, and adds: 'In the same way they adapt themselves so readily to Ugaritic hope that we are easily led to believe that this was

³⁴ Vawter, 'Intimations', p. 169.

³⁵ John Goldingay, 'Death and Afterlife in the Psalms', pp. 77, 84. We might also mention the unpublished dissertation of L. O. Dorn, 'The Beatific Vision in Certain Psalms: An Investigation of Mitchell Dahood's Hypothesis' (Ph.D. diss.; Chicago, IL: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1980), which came to a similarly negative conclusion. Both treatments follow Dahood in fragmenting the Psalms and discussing them essentially synchronically.

³⁶ A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), p. xcvi.

still there. But in both cases it was not.³⁷ So, like Vawter, Goldingay would like to obscure and sever the historical connections between the religions of Ugarit, Israel/Judah, and Christianity. But this approach denies historical religious processes by seeking to differentiate Israelite and Judahite religions too starkly from their precursors and inheritors. The Psalms are unavoidably in a historical continuum with their past and their future, so the only realistic historical perspective is to acknowledge that and seek to understand it. Equating any of these with the others is indeed an error, but denying the partial continuities among them is simply going to the other extreme.

Dahood's reception among Semitic linguists was a slightly different story. They were for some time not free to ignore such a prolific and prominent scholar – especially since Albright, the dominant figure in mid-century ANE studies, had praised Dahood in astonishingly strong terms:

In my opinion, Mitchell Dahood has already contributed more to our understanding of the vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew poetry than all other scholars combined. Even if only a third of his new interpretations of the Psalter are correct in principle – and I should put the total proportion higher – he has contributed more than all other scholars together, over the past two thousand years, to the elucidation of the Psalter.³⁸

We recall that Albright was Dahood's *Doktorvater*, so one might discount this comment. But more than that lay behind the senior scholar's approbation. Dahood was in some respects working out the implications of an idea that Albright had championed: the existence of ancestor cults in the Levant and early Israel. Albright's article 'The High Place in Ancient Palestine' was a touchstone in the early conversation about this topic.³⁹

It is now evident that the hitherto scattered biblical references to veneration of heroic shrines (e.g. Rachel and Deborah), cult of departed spirits or divination with their aid, and high places in general add up to a much greater significance for popular Israelite belief in life after death and the cult of the dead than has hitherto appeared prudent to admit. The rather negative attitude of the Prophets can now be explained at least in part as

³⁷ Goldingay, 'Death and Afterlife', p. 85.

³⁸ W. F. Albright, 'Some Excavation Reports and Syntheses', *BASOR* 186 (1967), p. 54.

³⁹ W. F. Albright, 'The High Place in Ancient Palestine', in *Volume du Congrès International pour l'étude de l'Ancien Testament, Strasbourg 1956*, VTSup 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1957), pp. 242–58. For a discussion of Albright and Dahood in relation to C. Barth, see Walter Wifall, 'The Status of "Man" as Resurrection', *ZAW*, 90 (1978), pp. 382–94.

due to conservative Yahwist reaction against objectionable funerary beliefs and practices. Moreover, we must be careful in future not to explain away passages in the Psalms and other poetic literature which suggest a more positive approach.⁴⁰

Far from being chastened by the resistance to this idea, Albright reaffirmed it in one of his last articles, which appeared in 1973, two years after his death: 'Both Israelites and pagans certainly believed in the immortality of the spirit.'⁴¹ Given that Albright is often now maligned as a conservative and a biblicist – a 'Bible and spade' sort of scholar – it is notable that he strongly believed that ancestor-cult practices had been prominent in ancient Israel.

For linguists, however, the devil was in the details. It is often remarked among Semitists that Dahood's method was simply to treat all of ancient Semitic literature as a 'lexical treasure-trove' (his own phrase)⁴² from which to hypothesise various linguistic features in the biblical text without regard for temporal or linguistic distance. Often, his argumentation is merely the citation of an Ugaritic or another (often controversial) biblical example of the same meaning or phenomenon.

In time, the unease with Dahood's comparative linguistics became a kind of trope, a cocktail-party game in which everyone put their own spin on Albright's percentage assessment. Dennis Pardee said in 1981:

I agree that 33% of Dahood's suggestions might be right. Prof. Andersen, in a recent interview, suggested that maybe 25% of someone's contributions might turn out to be correct. My question is: who is going to weed out the 67% or the 75%? It seems to me that it is putting an undue burden on the scholarly community to spend a good deal of its time weeding unacceptable material, and perhaps instead of doing that work, we should be training our students to weed out the unacceptable material themselves, so that the dissertations they publish are maybe 50% correct, or 60% correct, or 70% correct, rather than 25% to 33% correct.⁴³

⁴⁰ Albright, 'The High Place', p. 257.

⁴¹ W. F. Albright, 'From the Patriarchs to Moses II. Moses out of Egypt', *BA*, 36.2 (1973), p. 76. Albright also believed, just like Kaufmann, Wright, et al., in an actual 'Mosaic movement' inaugurated at Sinai that was opposed to the cult of the dead (and indeed he argued that Moses kept his own grave site a secret to avoid encouraging it!), but his views might be considered 'realistic' in that he recognised the ongoing temptation. In this same camp, one can put Gerhard von Rad; see his comments in his *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions, Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1, pp. 276–77 (German orig., 1957).

⁴² Smith, *Untold Stories*, p. 162.

⁴³ From the panel discussion following C. H. Gordon, 'Ugarit in Retrospect and Prospect', in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. by G. D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), p. 190.

Mark Smith picks up the retelling at this point in his history of Ugaritology, *Untold Stories*:

After Pardee contributed his revision of Gordon's numbers, Marvin Pope followed with a citation of Jonas Greenfield's assessment that the question is not simply whether 10 percent of Dahood's ideas are right, but which 10 percent.⁴⁴ D.N. Freedman would defend such a score. Speaking of this guess as to the percentage of correct proposals in Dahood's *oeuvre*, Freedman writes: 'I would say that 10% on almost anything biblical would be pretty good for most scholars, even the great ones.' Some scholars privately placed the percentage even lower, at 5 percent or less.⁴⁵

Similar cautionary advice was conveyed informally to graduate students coming up in the field, and so became a kind of received wisdom.⁴⁶ Even among Dahood's doctoral students, some of the most prominent openly rejected his methods and differentiated themselves from him.⁴⁷

Thus, among the critical, philological scholars whose support Dahood's theory needed, his name instead became synonymous with incautious comparativism and overreaching – for pan-Ugaritism and parallelomania. This hurt the reception of his work even where it did not depend on controversial philology.

The Psalms in the History of Israelite Religion

Not every scholar was a critic, though. Historians of Israelite religion in particular continued to work on the themes Dahood had helped to pioneer. He had written in *Psalms III*, 'I would be gratified if this heavily philological commentary were to elicit monographic studies of some of the ideas.'⁴⁸ Some were inspired by Dahood's example.

One of the earliest scholars to support his ideas about afterlife in the Psalms was J. H. Eaton; his *Kingship and the Psalms* seems to have been written while the opposition to Dahood was still only nascent, and it presents an effective case for royal afterlife:

⁴⁴ Pope in the same panel discussion: *Ugarit in Retrospect*, p. 194.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Untold Stories*, pp. 162–63. The Freedman comment is cited from a personal letter to Smith.

⁴⁶ The author was told a version of this by Patrick D. Miller around 2001, and an informal poll of international peers revealed that many of them also heard some version of the 'Dahood percentage estimate' from mentors. Citing the commentary is banned in certain exegesis classes on Psalms.

⁴⁷ See the beautiful obituary of Jesús-Luis Cunchillos, 'Vida y muerte de un pionero: Mitchell Dahood', *Estudios bíblicos*, 41.1–2 (1983), pp. 169–71.

⁴⁸ Dahood, *Psalms III*, p. lii.

God's gifts to his king culminate in the granting of 'life', involving deliverance from death and in some sense the eternal enjoyment of God's blessings. A prominent theme in the royal rituals concerned the king being threatened by death, appealing to God and so being delivered. In his subsequent enthroning it was stressed that his prayer for life had been granted; the glory which God now gave to the king involved eternal and blessed life. ... To some extent, then, the king seems to have been thought of as raised above a wholly negative fate in Sheol. Evidence of special privilege in this respect may be found in the siting of the royal burial chambers within Jerusalem and eventually, it seems, adjacent to the temple.⁴⁹

Eaton goes on to present, in very brief compass, a partial catalogue of the beliefs and practices of neighbouring cultures vis-à-vis the afterlife: the deification of the Egyptian king as Osiris; the Hittite king 'becoming a god' and afterlife ritual; the Hurrian expectation of 'the return of ancient kings'; Mesopotamian mortuary offerings and divinisation of kings; the Panamuwa/Hadad inscription; and the Ugaritic 'practice of erecting a stela and providing offering for dead kings, plus the deification of dead kings'.⁵⁰ This seems to have been intended to assert the essential plausibility of discovering references to afterlife in the Psalms, but since their relevance is not very much explained, the uninformed reader is in the dark, and the informed reader wonders how these points of comparison are meant to be applied.

Eaton was implicitly sensitive to the long history of the texts' composition and transmission in a comment, such as: 'The form of conception and degree of importance given to the "hereafter" aspect of the Davidic king's life no doubt varied and its deposit in the traditions was rather ambivalent.'⁵¹ In the end, though, he settles on quite a maximal interpretation:

the psalms do agree on the importance of the basic gift itself. God is the one who raises his king from the gates of death (9.14), who takes him from the watery maw of Sheol and of Belial (18; 40; 69; 116), who raises him from the dust of death to life in the temple and to the prospect of descendants (22). He brings him through the valley of the shadow of death and restores his soul to enjoy countless years in God's house (23) where he feeds on all goodness and looks on God's beauty (27). He revives him when sick and sets him up before his face for ever (41). He delivers him from death to walk to and fro in God's house, to trust and praise God for

⁴⁹ J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, SBT II/32 (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1976), pp. 160–61, 162–63.

⁵⁰ Eaton, *Kingship*, pp. 164–65.

⁵¹ Eaton, *Kingship*, p. 165.

eternity (52:10f.; cf. 92.13; 75.10) and acknowledge him as ‘God of my life’ (42.9), ‘the living God’ (18.47; 42.3).⁵²

This account, and Eaton’s analysis more generally, combine too many unclear texts to be fully precise. It also includes many psalms that clearly refer to the enduring nature of *the Davidic line* rather than the afterlife of individual kings. (Though, admittedly, in monarchic Jerusalem, each of these was seen as dependent on the other.)

Marshall Sahlins has written: ‘Two things are certain in the long run: one is that we’ll all be dead; but another is that we’ll all be wrong. Clearly, a good scholarly career is where the first comes before the second.’⁵³ It didn’t quite work out that way for Dahood, but he cut it closer than some. His sudden death of a heart attack in 1982 at only 60 years of age did not help the long-term reception of his work. He had been a gregarious and active participant in the field – Healey notes that his ‘personal charm and scholarly enthusiasm won him friends the world over’.⁵⁴ D. N. Freedman remembers Dahood enjoying ‘good Italian meals’ in Rome and ‘conducting friends, acquaintances, and visiting colleagues on informal tours of the museums, exhibits, churches, and other landmarks’.⁵⁵ The loss of his force of personality made it easier for those who wanted to dismiss or ignore his work to do so. It is striking that most of the obituaries that reviewed his contributions to the field focus on his linguistic and philological methods rather than his religio-historical views about the Psalms.

Not everyone wanted to forget, however. Healey was explicit about his intention to salvage Dahood’s argument in his 1984 essay, ‘The Immortality of the King: Ugarit and the Psalms’. He wanted to fix the problem that ‘Dahood did not put the argument in favour of immortality in the Psalms into a coherent context’. He notes that ‘shortly after the publication of *Psalms III* ... I was able to have several discussions on the immortality theme with Mitchell Dahood’ and that his suggestions ‘were seen and commented upon by Dahood himself’.⁵⁶ As his title suggests, Healey’s argument was that

the evidence of immortality in some psalms is frequently and most plausibly to be interpreted as a reflection of royal ideology, an ideology derived in a partly demythologized form from Canaanite tradition. The eternity of the king arises from his relationship with God and this may

⁵² Eaton, *Kingship*, p. 165.

⁵³ Marshall Sahlins, *Waiting for Foucault, Still* (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm, 2002), p. 2.

⁵⁴ Healey, ‘Immortality’, p. 245.

⁵⁵ Freedman, ‘Mitchell Dahood’, p. 185.

⁵⁶ Healey, ‘Immortality’, pp. 245–46.

be reflected in the practice of burying kings within the city. Later the notion of blessed eternal life was extended to all the righteous and, no doubt, new psalms were written incorporating this notion. Old psalms or psalm-themes would have been reinterpreted in terms of it. But rather than a radical departure, this development is a democratization of what was formerly a royal prerogative.⁵⁷

This, in my view, is very nearly on point. Healey reinforced much of what was right about Eaton's analysis while avoiding including too many Psalms. Two weaknesses remain: firstly, Healey's discussion of the actual Psalms is compressed into a mere two pages, meaning that he only nods to certain ones where he thinks Dahood's argument is acceptable. He has no room to discuss the philology on which it was all based, nor to analyse their diachronic development.

The second weakness also relates to diachrony: Healey's comment about 'democratisation' was very much in line with understandings about afterlife in Egypt at the time he was writing. Because most analyses of afterlife texts in Egypt began with the Pharaonic Pyramid Texts, then expanded to the Coffin Texts used by a small number of elites, and finally to the more widely available 'Book of the Dead', it was commonly said that the actual belief in the afterlife had expanded from the idea that only the king could be immortal to the idea that almost anyone could be. Healey was proposing an analogous, democratising process for the Psalms.

A few decades later, however, the Egyptological conversation has greatly shifted to recognise that this perceived 'democratisation' is actually only an artefact of the expansion of the use of *writing* to a wider public.⁵⁸ In other words, it is now the consensus that many people in Egypt believed in an afterlife long before they had the capacity to record that hope in writing. Since ancestor cults were a longstanding reality in the Levant as well, it strikes me as deeply unlikely that originally only the king dreamed of a good afterlife – even if the texts this book focuses on were originally royal. The implications of this insight will be discussed below.

Did I say that Healey's article had two weaknesses? Perhaps there was a third: no one seems to have listened to it.

In his review of Psalms scholarship a decade after Dahood's death, Adrian Curtis concluded that the influence of Dahood's work in this area had been minimal:

⁵⁷ Healey, 'Immortality', pp. 253–54.

⁵⁸ Mark S. Smith, 'Democratization of the Afterlife', in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. by Jacco Dieleman and Willeke Wendrich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), <<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz001nf62b>>.

While there has been a growing realisation that some sort of cult of the dead may have been a feature of the so-called popular religion of ancient Israel, does this really owe anything to Dahood? ... I think it is true to say that, even after the defence of this belief in the third volume of his commentary, very few scholars have been prepared to go so far as Dahood in such a belief.⁵⁹

As the opening sentence reflects, Curtis was now in a decade in which biblical beliefs about afterlife were finally being reassessed, and the simplistic assumption that afterlife for ancient Israelites and Judahites meant only a shadowy existence in Sheol was being forcefully questioned – this time on much stronger textual and archaeology data than had been the case a century earlier. As Curtis noted in a footnote: ‘Dahood is not mentioned in the index of Elizabeth Bloch-Smith’s recent book on *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead*.⁶⁰ He could also have mentioned that Theodore Lewis, in his *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (1989), draws on Dahood’s work only for philological suggestions, and only in a handful of cases.⁶¹ Recent thematic introductions by major Psalms scholars have generally come down negatively on afterlife in the Psalms as well.⁶²

Even John Day, a student of Eaton’s, dismisses Dahood in his own Psalms commentary (‘his interpretations are highly dubious and have failed to convince many scholars’),⁶³ although he does allow that ‘Psalms 49 and 73 seem to envisage a blessed life after death as part of the vindication of the righteous.’⁶⁴ Due to the brief compass of the series, he is not able to elaborate much on the significance of this observation.

As an exception, one should again take account of Klaas Spronk, whose *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (1986) engages more deeply with Dahood – not surprising for what was originally

⁵⁹ Adrian H. W. Curtis, ‘The Psalms Since Dahood’, in *Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible, Manchester, September 1992*, ed. by G. J. Brooke, A. Curtis, and J. F. Healy, UBL 11 (Munich: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), p. 8.

⁶⁰ Curtis, ‘The Psalms since Dahood’, p. 8 n. 21. Cf. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead*, JSOTSup 123 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991).

⁶¹ Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, HSM 39 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1989).

⁶² e.g. Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1990), p. 169; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), p. 167.

⁶³ John Day, *Psalms*, OTG (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), p. 132.

⁶⁴ Day, *Psalms*, p. 56.

a doctoral thesis written under the Ugaritologist J. C. de Moor.⁶⁵ His conclusion is that ‘Dahood certainly goes too far’,⁶⁶ but he carefully rehabilitates certain aspects of Dahood’s thesis. He writes that

Whereas Barth maintains that belief in YHWH who rescues from death, as it is attested in many of the Psalms, has nothing to do with belief in beatific afterlife, Dahood is of the opinion that the ‘obvious meaning’ of these Psalm texts is belief in resurrection and immortality. Both positions can be criticized for being too static.⁶⁷

In particular, Spronk observes that ‘there appears to be a growing tendency among Old Testament scholars to support Dahood’s theory on at least one point: the Israelites may have believed in eternal life after death for the king’.⁶⁸ In this respect, Spronk reproduced the finding by Healey, who had an advisory role in the thesis.

Various scholars, then, were looking for a more nuanced way to affirm some of what Dahood argued. Even Curtis was searching for better definitions and distinctions:

Fear of the dead, belief that it was important to make provision for the dead, and perhaps even a sense of some sort of community with the dead ancestors, are all very different, it seems to me, from belief in a beatific afterlife in which God will reward the righteous by allowing them to dwell in the Hebrew equivalent of the Elysian Fields.⁶⁹

In a deeper sense, it seems likely that most of the work from the 80s and 90s that made current scholarship on death and afterlife possible had its roots in the efforts to salvage some of what Albright and Dahood argued. We have already noted Spronk’s lineage, and T. J. Lewis was a scholarly grandson to Albright (via Frank Moore Cross at Harvard).

My own ongoing work on death and afterlife in the Psalms is not an attempt to rehabilitate Dahood, *per se* – but rather to name accurately what it is in the Psalms that he and many other interpreters have seen over time. I have noted Dahood’s lack of caution about defining his terms and his inattention to the diachronic changes in the Psalms created by redaction and compilation. Furthermore, our understanding of the religions of the

⁶⁵ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, esp. pp. 77–81. De Moor was critical of Dahood like many others, but appreciated some of his contributions. See Hershel Shanks, ‘Mitchell Dahood – *In Memoriam*’, *BAR*, 8 (1982), p. 58.

⁶⁶ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, p. 284.

⁶⁷ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, p. 282.

⁶⁸ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, p. 80.

⁶⁹ Curtis, ‘The Psalms since Dahood’, p. 8.

Levant in the Iron Age is significantly better now than it was 50 years ago, which offers a clearer picture of the features we might expect to see in a royal mortuary prayer from the time of the Davidic monarchy. All of these aspects are significant to the archaeological project that is excavating the royal mortuary religion of ancient Jerusalem.

Some might call it a mistake to apply this archaeological metaphor to the analysis of ancient texts. After all, isn't archaeology a science, as opposed to the art of textual interpretation? But indeed, archaeological remains demand interpretation as much as texts; and the role of imagination in interpretation is not to be underestimated. Imagination cannot be excluded from the interpretation of ancient data, as gapped and spotty as it is. Rather, the goal is to train our imaginations on the right materials and models so that our perceptions are as real and plausible as possible. Given the extent to which we are all building on past scholarship, it is indispensable to cultivate an awareness of the way our predecessors in the field have thought and imagined.

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Epilogue

Jan N. Bremmer

At the end of this interesting and innovative collection of papers, readers will naturally ask themselves: what have we learned that we did not yet know? The question is not an unreasonable one as there have been many studies of death and death rituals in the ancient world. Yet these works have often concentrated on material culture and the descriptions of funerals and pictures of the beyond in great literature. It is the great merit of this rich volume to go beyond that evidence and to pose other questions which show that recent trends in the humanities, such as the study of emotions and attention to the sensory aspects, have now also reached the study of ancient death. As the editors in their illuminating preambles have already discussed many features of the book, I will limit myself to a few observations regarding those trends. Before we come to these, though, let me first note two other aspects that might have struck some readers.

First, readers may have been surprised by the selection of the geographical areas. Admittedly, there can be little doubt that some of these did influence one another. Mesopotamian impact on the Creation and Flood stories of Genesis in the Old Testament is well known. Similarly, the influence of Mesopotamian literature on Greek ideas of the afterlife is generally accepted, even if there still is much debate as to its precise nature and the ways we have to imagine that influence. Also, as especially Riedemann (Ch. 7) shows, the Etruscans were much influenced by the Greeks, even though here too the amount of appropriation of their myths is clearly a hot issue. On the other hand, it is much less well known that Egypt, with its very rich funerary and eschatological traditions, as shown here by Lucarelli (Ch. 3), also influenced Greece in various ways, perhaps even the Orphics in particular.¹ Given the attention to the Etruscans, the nature of early Roman ideas about the afterlife might also have merited

¹ Robert Drew Griffith, *Mummy Wheat: Egyptian Influence on the Homeric View of the Afterlife and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008); Jan N. Bremmer, *The World of Greek Religion and Mythology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), pp. 206–09 (Orphics).

some attention. We are so used to scenes such as Aeneas' descent in to the underworld that we tend to forget that we have very little evidence for a belief in a beyond for the older layers of Roman religion.² In fact, the early Romans had only vague ideas of an afterlife.³ And they clearly seem to have changed over time, just as the Etruscans seem to have developed new ideas already in the sixth century with an increasing influence of Dionysos, as Weber-Lehmann argues (Ch. 9).

On the other hand, many readers may also have been surprised by the similarity in ideas between areas and cultures that are far apart. For example, as the study by Katz (Ch. 2) shows, the ancient Mesopotamians conceived the transition of the land of the living to that of the dead as a journey, as did the Incas as shown by Ożarowska (Ch. 4). But we find the same idea among the ancient Greeks, as we can see in Euripides' *Alcestis*, so illuminatingly discussed by Hunter (Ch. 1), where Alcestis exclaims: 'Ah, what a journey it is that I, unhappiest of women, am making!' (263). Similarly, in Sophocles' homonymous tragedy Ajax says: 'For I will go to that place where I must travel' (690), and in Sophocles' *Antigone* the heroine, too, uses the word 'travel' (*poruō*) with reference to her descent to the underworld (891–93).⁴ As Katz also shows, the Mesopotamians imagined the underworld as 'the dark house, the seat of Irkalla'. Yet we find this imagination of the underworld as a house also among the Greeks, where we repeatedly hear of the 'house of Hades'. Although the expression appears in various forms in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, singular and plural,⁵ it must be old, as it has Hittite, Indian, Irish, and Roman parallels.⁶ Last but not least, as Katz notes, 'Enlil crossed the "river of the netherworld" (id2-kur), whose name is "The man-eating river".' In his case, we do not hear of assistance in the crossing, but in other Mesopotamian texts Gilgamesh can be called

² For Aeneas' descent, but also other descents to the underworld, see now Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, *Catabasis: El viaje infernal en la antigüedad* (Madrid: Alianza, 2023).

³ See especially George Thaniel, 'Themes of Death in Roman Religion and Poetry', Ph.D. diss. (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1973), overlooked by Charles W. King, *The Ancient Roman Afterlife: Di Manes, Belief, and the Cult of the Dead* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2020).

⁴ Note also Aristophanes, *Frogs* 109–18; Angelos Chaniotis, 'Das Jenseits: Eine Gegenwelt?', in *Gegenwelten zu den Kulturen Griechenlands und Roms in der Antike*, ed. by Tonio Hölscher (Munich: Saur, 2000), pp. 159–81 at 163–64 with more examples from epitaphs.

⁵ Among others: *Iliad* III.322, VII.131, XIV.457; *Odyssey* 9.524, 10.512, 11.150, etc.

⁶ Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 107–18 ('The House of Clay,' first published in 1982); Martin West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 388; Vergilius, *Aeneis* 6.269: *domos Ditis*.

‘ferryman of the netherworld’. Such an assisting figure in crossing the river to the beyond is not unique to the ancient Near East. Many Indo-European traditions know of a ferryman (never: ferrywoman) of the dead, as do several other eschatological traditions, such as those of Egypt.⁷ Apparently, for the Greeks the figure of old Charon, the ferryman of the dead, was so present that Euripides could let Alcestis evoke him in her terrifying vision of Hades, as Hunter (Ch. 1) shows. These imagined roles for rivers, or even lakes and seas as with the Incas (Ch. 4), as boundaries between the living and the dead must say something about the impact rivers had on these earlier civilisations. They were clearly experienced as much bigger barriers than in our own time, where everywhere bridges have taken away this element of separation between one area and the one at the other side.

In general, the similarities show that many cultures imagined the beyond as resembling the land of the living in a number of ways, whereas, on the other hand, they combined this with imagining the beyond as the opposite of the present world, by, for example in the Greek and Roman imagination, as a cold and mirthless world where no sun ever shines.⁸ We can see in those negative pictures a thought pattern that has been more often explored in the other opposite of the land of the living, an imaginary paradise, but which essentially functions in the same manner.⁹ The similarities sometimes can be explained by continuities from a distant ancestor as in the Indo-European cultures, but also by continuity across time, as Bosnakis (Ch. 5) argues, when he notes a number of similarities between ancient Greece and the modern Greeks in the treatment of the bodies of very young children.¹⁰ Some of these continuities are only partial. In the case of the *vrykólakes*/vampires, for example, there is also clear Slavonic influence, even though a preoccupation with those who had been

⁷ Daniel Schwemer, ‘Entrusting the Witches to Ĥumut-tabal: The *ušburruda* Ritual BM 47806+’, *Iraq*, 72 (2010), pp. 63–78 at 71 (Gilgamesh); Krešimir Matijević, *Ursprung und Charakter der homerischen Jenseitsvorstellungen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015), p. 52 (Egypt).

⁸ Greek: Matijević, *Ursprung*; George A. Gazis, *Homer and the Poetics of Hades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Ellie Mackin Roberts, *Underworld Gods in Ancient Greek Religion: Death and Reciprocity* (London: Routledge, 2020). Roman: Verg. *Aen.* 6. 534: *tristis sine sole domos*.

⁹ Malcolm Davies, ‘Description by Negation: History of a Thought Pattern in Ancient Accounts of Blissful Life’, *Prometheus*, 13 (1987), pp. 265–84; Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice*, pp. 23–31 (‘On the imagery of Paradise,’ first published in 1980).

¹⁰ For a rich survey of the ways these children were disposed of in the ancient world, see Nathalie Baills-Talbi and Véronique Dasen, ‘Rites funéraires et pratiques magiques’, in *Nasciturus, infans, puerulus vobis mater terra: La muerte en la infancia*, ed. by Francesc Gusi et al. (Castellón: Servicio de Publicaciones Diputación de Castellón, 2008), pp. 595–618.

denied proper burial can already be found in ancient Greece, where a typical vampire, though, did not yet exist.¹¹ On the other hand, Bosnakis also alerts us to surprising continuities, such as the presence of the *telonia*, demonic creatures associated with young children who did not die a socially approved death. Originally, early Christians used the term for the angels who inspected the soul before it could be allowed into heaven and, as such, is an interesting illustration of the thoroughness of the tax officials' investigations and the fear they instilled in the population of the Roman Empire, especially the Eastern part, in late antiquity. In the course of time, these *telonia* developed from angels into demons, after which, although much later, they were connected with unbaptised deceased children.¹²

Let us now turn from these similarities and continuities to what I consider to be innovative notions in the analysis of the imagination of death as presented in this book. Here I would like to mention two in particular. First, the question of handling of and coping with emotions after death, especially after the death of children. Hope (Ch. 6) rightly takes her point of departure in a classic article of the Canadian ancient historian Mark Golden (1948–2020), entitled 'Did the Ancients Care When Their Children Died?', which he wrote after having experienced himself such a loss.¹³ However, Golden concentrated on grief, whereas Hope focuses more on mourning; that is, to the extent that we can separate these two notions. Whereas Golden was interested in the private reactions of parents, inspired by his own personal loss, Hope pays more attention to the public aspects of that grief as expressed in mourning. After an instructive discussion of the term *acerbus*, showing that the adjective denoted the 'bitterness' of the often prematurely passing away of the deceased, she persuasively concludes that the actual evidence for a specific funeral in the case of those immature deaths, the so-called *funus acerbum*, is less conclusive than often suggested.

However, from Plutarch's *Life of Numa* (c. 12) we learn that at some time the Romans had forbidden to mourn children less than 3 years old, but also that the longest mourning was to be 10 months. We do not know to what extent these regulations were enforced, but the notice suggests

¹¹ For the similarities and differences with modern vampire beliefs, see Peter von Möllendorff, 'Pacta sunt servanda. Die Bedeutung eines antiken Motivs für die Vampirerzählung der Moderne', in *Der Vampir. Ein europäischer Mythos des kulturellen Transfers*, ed. by Raul Calzoni and Kirsten von Hagen (Munich: AVM-Akademische Verlagsgemeinschaft, 2023), pp. 25–53.

¹² Gerard J. M. Bartelink, 'Τελῶναι (Zöllner) als Dämonen- bezeichnung', *Sacris Erudiri*, 27 (1984), pp. 5–18. For the tax collectors, see also Aliyah El Mansy, *Τελῶναι im Neuen Testament. Zwischen sozialer Realität und literarischem Stereotyp* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023).

¹³ Mark Golden, 'Did the Ancients Care When Their Children Died?', *Greece & Rome*, 35.2 (1988), pp. 152–63.

that there had long been an emotional regime regarding the expression of mourning, perhaps instituted also with an eye at the many Romans that must have died in the frequent wars. In any case, there can be no doubt that the early Romans tried to constrain the expression of emotions to a larger degree than we find for ancient Greece, although in Archaic Athens (c. 800–500 BCE), too, there was a limit to the ways women were allowed to express their mourning in public, as Plutarch tells us in his *Life of Solon* (21.4). Hope interestingly wonders to what extent the Roman regime was supported by an actual emotional community and suggests the possibility of separate or overlapping emotional communities,¹⁴ which seems not unlikely given the hierarchical nature of Roman society.

There clearly is much more research to be done in this field, as we should correlate the literary and epigraphical evidence with that of the iconographical material, which suggests changing attitudes towards mourning in imperial times.¹⁵ An early separate emotional community must have been the emerging group of Christ followers. It would be rewarding to follow in detail the development of the traditional Roman attitudes and practices as regards emotional aspects as they developed in the course of late antiquity. The promise of the resurrection but also the question what happens to unbaptised children must have changed the emotional regime and, perhaps, led to a more uniform emotional community.¹⁶ But this topic clearly calls for a book rather than an epilogue.

The second issue that struck me in this volume is the attention to the sensory aspects of the death and funeral of members of the imperial family as exemplified in Christoforou's analysis of the burials of Germanicus and several Roman emperors (Ch. 10). As he notes, scholars rarely ask what the

¹⁴ For these terms as applied to antiquity, see Angelos Chaniotis, 'Emotional Community through Ritual: Initiates, Citizens, and Pilgrims as Emotional Communities in the Greek World', in *Ritual Dynamics in the Ancient Mediterranean: Agency, Emotion, Gender, Representation*, ed. by Angelos Chaniotis (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2011), pp. 263–90, and 'The Social Construction of Emotion: A View from Ancient Greece', *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 24 (2018), pp. 56–61. For the problem of change in emotional regimes, see David Konstan, 'Their Emotions and Ours: a Single History?', *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques*, 16 (2016), <<http://journals.openedition.org/acrh/6756>> [accessed 20 November 2023]; Douglas Cairns, 'Emotions through Time?', in *Emotions through Time: From Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. by Douglas Cairns et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), pp. 3–33.

¹⁵ Anna Schreiber-Schermutzki, 'Trauer am Grab – Trauerdarstellungen auf römischen Sepulkraldenkmälern', Ph.D. Diss. (Freiburg, 2008), <<https://freidok.uni-freiburg.de/fedora/objects/freidok:6958/datastreams/FILE2/content>> [accessed 20 November 2023].

¹⁶ For the later developments see, with rich bibliography, Elena Zocca, 'Acerba funera. "Pagani" e Cristiani di fronte alla morte infantile', *Augustinianum*, 61.2 (2021), pp. 527–52.

Romans felt ‘in viewing the body, the open mourning, the playing of music, the eating of food, the placement of flowers, and the burning of incense’ because they usually focus on the events of the ritual, the mourning gestures or the manner of disposing of the dead body.¹⁷ His approach clearly fits a recent trend that enquires into the place of the senses in antiquity, a trend that has already resulted, nearly inevitably, in its own book series.¹⁸

The death of Germanicus was an exceptionally emotional affair, which is hard to parallel in Roman history with people stoning temples, upsetting altars, throwing out their household gods and even exposing their newborn children.¹⁹ Evidently, the Roman people felt utterly devastated by the unexpected death of this young and promising imperial prince. It is a unique testimony, which has, not improbably, been compared to the British reactions to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in a car accident in 1997.²⁰ The Roman reaction is a fine example of how people can feel when they hear of the death of a very popular prince.

Regarding the senses, Christoforou adduces the notice of Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (12.83) that Nero burned more than a year’s output of Arabian perfume, which was rather costly, at the funeral of his wife Poppaea. The undoubtedly wonderful fragrance produced by this conspicuous consumption of perfume fitted the theatrical nature of Nero, but we should not forget that it also served another purpose. Its aim was certainly also to counter the unpleasant smell of a burning body.²¹ Similarly, according to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (15.2), the Christian faithful smelled a delightful fragrance, as of wafting frankincense, when their old bishop was burning on the pyre – a miracle perceived only by them. A study of the senses, then, must always also consider their social and political context.

Unfortunately, we rarely hear of what the average Roman felt at a

¹⁷ This approach would of course also be very fruitful for the study of Greek death. For a good example, see Nathan T. Arrington, ‘Touch and Remembrance in Greek Funerary Art’, *Art Bulletin*, 100.3 (2018), pp. 7–27.

¹⁸ See Markus Bradley et al., eds, *The Senses in Antiquity*, 6 vols (Durham: Acumen; London: Routledge, 2013–15).

¹⁹ Suetonius, *Caligula* 5, cf. Henk S. Versnel, ‘Destruction, *Devotio* and Despair in a Situation of Anomy: The Mourning for Germanicus in Triple Perspective’, in *Perennitas. Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich*, ed. by Giulia Piccaluga (Rome: Ateneo, 1980), pp. 541–618.

²⁰ Andreas Hartmann, ‘Germanicus und Lady Di: zur öffentlichen Verarbeitung zweier Todesfälle’, in *Der Vergleich – eine Methode zur Förderung historischer Kompetenzen. Ausgewählte Beispiele*, ed. by Waltraud Schreiber (Neuried: Ars una, 2005), pp. 61–126.

²¹ For the latter smell see, for example: <<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2007/03/what-does-burning-human-flesh-smell-like.html#:~:text=When%20a%20whole%20human%20body,they%20smell%20like%20burnt%20liver>> [accessed 20 November 2023].

funeral ceremony of an emperor. Undoubtedly, these occasions must often have been impressive affairs. Especially, when seeing an eagle flying from the pyre, as was told of various emperors, and, albeit somewhat later, peacocks in the case of empresses, the spectators must have been amazed by the whole display. It is very rare that we hear a dissenting voice, but we should note that those must have existed too in the case of people who were sceptical about the deification of the emperors as symbolised by the ascent of the eagle. We are lucky that we have such a case. In his *Peregrinus* (c. 39), Lucian tells us that when Proteus (as the Cynic Peregrinus was called later in his career) had thrown himself on a pyre during the Olympic Games of 165 CE, ‘a vulture flew up from the midst of the flames and went off to heaven, loudly saying with a human voice: “I left the earth, but I go to the Olympus.”’ By transforming the eagle into a vulture, already an unpleasant bird in antiquity, Lucian clearly made fun of the whole ceremony. We should never forget that death and its ceremonies can evoke very different reactions.

There is, of course, much more to be said, such as about the ways in which people imagined the deceased, comparing, for example, the Egyptian idea of their post-mortem existence (Ch. 3) with that of the Incas with their *huacas* (Ch. 4).²² And when reading Suriano (Ch. 8) of how Jerusalem’s elite broke with the tradition of established family burial-sites and built its own monolithic tombs, one might wonder if the modern idea of individualisation might not be helpful to explain this change of the viewscape of the capital in addition to ideas of self-aggrandisement.²³ Ultimately, however, we are left asking ourselves to what extent these new interpretations are influenced by our own *zeitgeist* or world view. The chapter by Hays (Ch. 11) is a sobering analysis of the attempts to find ideas about the afterlife and the resurrection in the Psalms. It is clear from his discussion that scholars, even the greatest, can be led astray by their own prejudices. However, we always need imagination to make progress with our research, as Hays rightly argues. Fortunately, there is plenty of that in this book, which shows that the subject of imagining death continues to challenge the imagination of the living in many fruitful ways.

²² For the meaning of *huaca*, see also Carlo Ginzburg, *La lettera uccide* (Milan: Adelphi, 2021), pp. 117–33.

²³ See Martin Fuchs et al., eds, *Religious Individualisation. Historical Dimensions and Comparative Perspectives* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020).

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