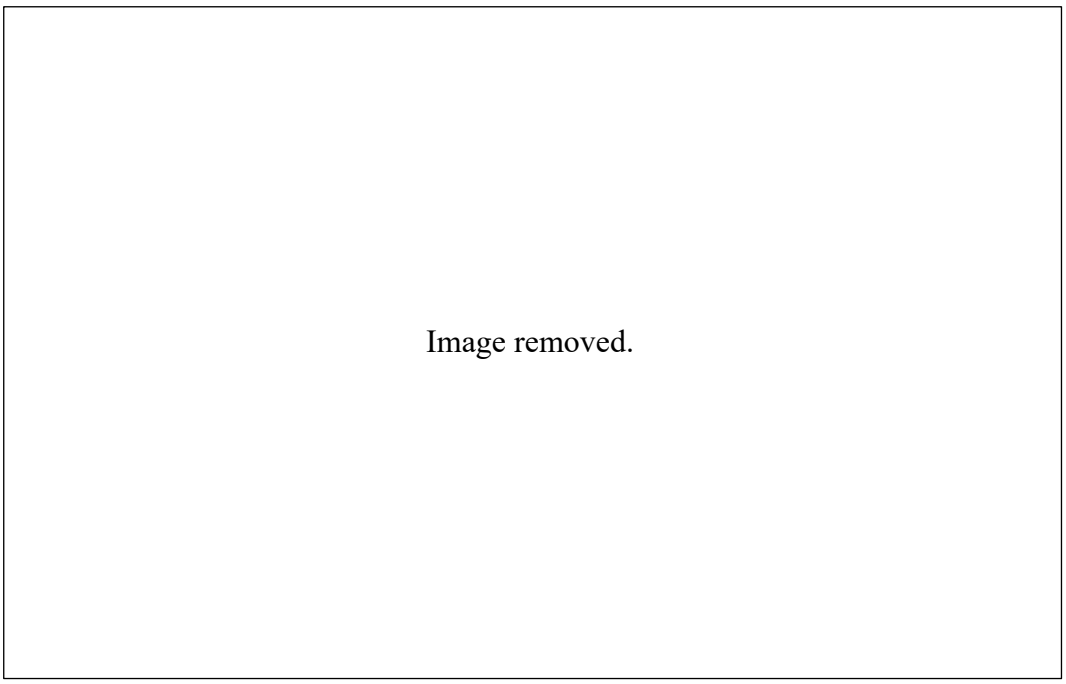
ENCOUNTERING DEATH IN THE VISUAL AND VERBAL CULTURE OF CLASSICAL ATHENS

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Classical Languages and Literature



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ABSTRACT

This thesis builds a picture of culturally-mediated encounters with death in classical Athens. Starting from the premise that death is a mystery, that no one knows what death is and what it is like, I ask two core questions. First, how does visual and verbal culture drawn from the classical period (broadly conceived, to encompass late archaic/early classical and early fourth-century material) generate encounters with death? Second, how does it prompt reflections on the imaginative processes involved in responding to death from the perspective of the living? My approach is by way of case studies, and each chapter covers a distinct medium: literary philosophy, painted pots, tragic drama, temple sculpture, and historiography.

My claim is that existential reflection in classical Athens was not confined to a group of elite thinkers and to the texts that they produced, texts that were self-consciously philosophical or that made death the explicit focus of enquiry. Reflections on death were also generated by diffuse and idiosyncratic interactions between individuals and visual or verbal media in a variety of contexts across Athens, and by dialogues between those encounters. Texts and material culture generated and shaped encounters with death, and also generated and shaped epistemological reflections on the imaginative nature of those encounters—upon the immediate and wider cultural frameworks within which such imaginative processes took place. In my conclusion, I expand this claim by considering the wider implications of my thesis when set against a background of intense intellectual and cultural activity in classical Athens.

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Thank you to all my family, especially Matt for challenging and clarifying my thinking, Jessica for inspiration, my parents for time, and my cheerleaders Felix and Jasper, who have not yet encountered life beyond this thesis.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations follow those of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, fourth edition. Exceptions are listed below.

Add^2	Carpenter, T. H., T. Mannack and M. Mendonça. 1989. *Beazley Addenda: Additional References to ABV, ARV*^{2} *& Paralipomena*, second edition. Oxford.
ARV^2	Beazley, J. D. 1963. *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, second edition. Oxford.
AVI	Attic Vase Inscriptions (https://avi.unibas.ch/).
BAPD	Beazley Archive Pottery Database (https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/carc/pottery).
Para	Beazley, J. D. 1971. *Paralipomena: Additions to 'Attic Black-figure Vase-painters' and 'Attic Red-figure Vase-painters'*, second edition. Oxford.
Voigt	Voigt, E.-M. (ed.). 1971. *Sappho et Alcaeus. Fragmenta*. Amsterdam.
West	West, M. L. 1971. *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantati*, two volumes. Oxford. (I.E.G.)

INTRODUCTION

ENCOUNTERING DEATH

IN THE VISUAL AND VERBAL CULTURE

OF CLASSICAL ATHENS

> ὅς ποτε ἐν πολέμῳ τελευτήσας, ἀναιρεθέντων δεκαταίων τῶν νεκρῶν ἤδη διεφθαρμένων, ὑγιὴς μὲν ἀνῃρέθη, κομισθεὶς δ' οἴκαδε μέλλων θάπτεσθαι δωδεκαταῖος ἐπὶ τῇ πυρᾷ κείμενος ἀνεβίω, ἀναβιοὺς δ' ἔλεγεν ἃ ἐκεῖ ἴδοι.
>
> Once upon a time [a man called Er] died in battle. Though the other corpses gathered for burial had already been decomposing for ten days, his was carried from the field in full health. But when it had been brought home, and was about to be given funeral rites on the twelfth day, he came back to life while lying on the pyre, and upon his return to life he recounted what he had seen in the other world.
>
> Socrates on Er in Plato, *Republic* 10.614b

At the end of the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates tells the story of Er, a man who is permitted to return from death with his memory intact to describe the afterlife to the living (10.614b-621d).[1] Er's story is a fantasy in more ways than one. He represents the quintessential privileged narrator, the reliable witness permitted a peek behind the veil of death.[2] Er's experience, and the knowledge he acquires, breaks a general rule. Death is a reality that all mortals must, at some point, face, but that no one can try out in advance.[3] Death is, normally, the 'great unknown'.

[1] Here and throughout the thesis, unless otherwise indicated, Greek text is taken from the most recent OCT, line references are to the text as printed in the OCT, and translations are my own.

[2] In referring to the 'veil of death', I draw on a familiar metaphor. This is not just a modern way of imagining the border between life and death and the mystery of what lies beyond (consider Sirius Black's fall through a black curtain in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*): the 'veil' features, for example, in Plato's *Phaedo* and in the tondo of a drinking cup above a corpse (see chapters one and two).

[3] This seems a self-evident truth. See further McManners (1981: 1) on writing as a historian of death, 'we never have reports from the inside; we are always external observers' and Díez de Velasco (1995: 11) on 'la muerte, realidad experiencial pero no experimentable'. Exceptions are unusual and miraculous, like Er. On 'second-fated ones' or *deuteropotmoi* (those who are thought to be dead, but who turn out to be alive), see Garland (2001: 100-1). Note further Jackson Knight (1970: 63-64, 79, 92) on evidence for belief in ancient Greece that direct experience of the other world was

But the myth of Er does not just reflect and respond to a human longing to know what death is and what it is like, it is explicitly and emphatically presented as a story. Socrates describes it as a tale: first as an ἀπόλογος (614b), later as a μῦθος (621c).[4] This tale is part of a longer one narrated by Socrates, the tale of a conversation he once had with, amongst others, Glaucon, during which he recounted the story of Er. Indeed, the story within a story itself contains many stories: Er bases the first part of his own account on stories told by the souls that he met in the afterlife of *their* experiences and sights, stories that he has been forced to abbreviate (τὸ δ' οὖν κεφάλαιον, 615a) because 'they would take a long time to describe' (πολλοῦ χρόνου διηγήσασθαι, 615a). And all these stories are told, ultimately, by the writer-narrator: Plato. The layer upon layer of messengers emphasises the distance that stands between the situation of the living and experience of death.[5] Even Er falls victim to that distance. Beyond the momentous

possible. Other examples crop up in different times and places. Consider the story of Lazarus in the Bible (UBS *Greek New Testament*, fifth edition, 2014, John 11: 1-44): crucially, this is understood to be the work of God. Note, further, the plethora of contemporary stories of near death experiences, synthesised in Moody (2022: 8-76, with discussion of the myth of Er at 82), and academic studies, such as those associated with IANDS, the International Association for Near-Death Studies. I make no claims as to whether or not these stories and experiences are true (they were surely experienced as real), only that they present an epistemological problem. Everyone else must trust the statements of the miraculous few.

[4] On the status of myth and *muthoi* in Plato, see especially Smith (1985); Moors (1988); Brisson (1998); Murray (1999); Morgan (2000: chs. 5-8); Halliwell (2007: 452-56); Collobert, Destrée and González (2012: esp. pt. 1); Halliwell (2021: 16-19). See further chapter 1, notes 80 and 98. A Platonic *muthos* is an important form of argument.

[5] There is limited mention of these epistemological implications in scholarship on this section of Plato's *Republic*. Most important is Halliwell (2007: esp. 448-50, 458, 460, 471-72) on layering and diegetic ambiguity in Plato's writing of this myth and the resulting uncertainty, 'a silence that is both dramatic and metaphysical'. He also notes Er's dubious claim to authority, which Socrates must take for granted (p. 458). See further Morgan (2000: 204-10, esp. 209): Kathryn Morgan emphasises the 'self-qualification' of the myth in part as a 'tale told by someone else', and proposes that this is 'a way of stressing the difficulty of talking about the metaphysical'. Also notable are Tarrant (1955b: 223) and Thayer (1988: esp. 369, 371, 376). Dorothy Tarrant observes (on Socrates' relation of Er's report), 'the oblique construction enhances the impression of tidings from afar'. She does not elaborate on the problems that this distance might raise; her discussion is focused on comparing grammatical features of Plato's uses of reported speech. H. S. Thayer, too, opens his article with the statement 'The myth of Er is a story within a story' and a distinction between the temporalities of different Socrateses in the *Republic.* But his purpose is to position the *Republic* and Socrates, by analogy with the myth and Er, as a reliable handbook and messenger to guide us in our pursuit of knowledge and virtue.

information (given somewhat in passing) that his soul went out of him but continued to exist,[6] much of the insight into death, or what happens after death, that he offers is not based on experience, but on observation: on listening and watching.[7] The messenger from the world of the dead is, essentially, a witness, albeit of more than most mortals ever get to see. The myth of Er thus reflects and models the epistemological challenge posed by death: for the living, dying and death are processes and events to be extrapolated from outside observation of another's experience.

I have opened this thesis with an extract from Plato and an existential and epistemological problem: how could we ever *know* what it is like to die? But this is not a philosophy thesis (or, at least, not a traditional philosophy thesis). Similarly, it is not a collation of or enquiry into what ancient Athenians thought or believed about the event or experience of death (although I do hope that readers will glean some ideas from my discussion). Instead, my goal is to build a cultural history of epistemological reflection on death through texts and artefacts. Starting from the premise that death is a mystery,[8] I explore how texts and material culture, from Plato to pots, from Sophocles to temple sculpture to Thucydides, reflect that

[6] *Resp.* 614c.
[7] In fact, this is specifically what he is instructed to do by the judges of the dead (614d): ἑαυτοῦ δὲ προσελθόντος εἰπεῖν ὅτι δέοι αὐτὸν ἄγγελον ἀνθρώποις γενέσθαι τῶν ἐκεῖ, καὶ διακελεύοιντό οἱ ἀκούειν τε καὶ θεᾶσθαι πάντα τὰ ἐν τῷ τόπῳ ('and he said that when he came forwards they said that he must be a messenger to mankind of the things there, and they directed him *to listen to and watch everything* in that place') (my emphasis).
[8] This is a reasonable axiom for Greek culture. On the lack of certainty as to 'the how of death' in ancient Greece, see Lloyd (1987: 8-11). Among other things, the fear of what death might involve (a fear that is to be dispelled by argument) features in several of Plato's dialogues and, in at least one (the *Apology*), Socrates considers more than one possibility (see note 124 on page 76). Consider, further, the 'orphic' gold tablets, which may indicate that, for some at least, membership of an elite societal group brought privileged eschatological knowledge. On these tablets, see the contributions in Edmonds (2011), especially the chapter by Christoph Riedweg (2011: 238). See further note 52 on page 30.

mystery and prompt reflection on the challenges of knowing what death is and what it is like. A more grandiose way of putting this is that my thesis is about the different ways in which the visual and verbal culture of classical Athens mediates ontological and epistemological reflection on dying.

Put simply, and to use Plato's myth of Er as an example, I am interested in how Plato turns attention upon the difficulty of knowing what happens when we die by presenting a myth shrouded in layer upon layer of distance. This is a different angle from that often adopted by ancient philosophers or philologists towards this section of the *Republic*.[9] What Plato might or might not have been saying about the afterlife, the soul, the cosmos, virtue or justice is not my point. I am interested in the existential and epistemological thinking that is crystallised upon encountering death in his text, a text that is a web of messenger speeches with claims to privileged insight. Essentially, my study has two strands. First, how each work that I discuss generates encounters with death. Second, how, by staging the contradictions and challenges inherent in those encounters, each provokes meditation on the imaginative processes involved in responding to death from the perspective of the living.

[9] For obvious reasons, much commentary on the myth of Er has focused on how it connects to discussions in the wider *Republic* about justice and poetry, and on its description of the workings of the universe and the fate and rebirth of the soul. See, for example, Richardson (1926) and Morrison (1955) on the structure of the universe; White (1979: 263-64) on the myth's message regarding the punishment of injustice and reward for justice after death; Moors (1988: 219-20, 240-47) on the lessons of the myth vis-à-vis opinion and knowledge; Bouvier (2001) on the contribution of the myth to a discourse on *mimesis* and education; McPherran (2010) on the myth as an allegory for life and the ethical choices we must make (Annas (1981: 344-53) and Stewart (1960: 146-78) similarly emphasised the educational force of the myth with respect to the choices made in life, though Julia Annas criticized the 'lame and messy ending' and John Alexander Stewart, an Oxford professor, framed the myth in terms of 'liberal education' for a man's life of choices). See note 5.

CHAPTERS AND THEMES

I focus on texts and material culture drawn from the classical period of Athens (broadly conceived, to encompass late archaic/early classical and early fourth-century material).[10] Each one of my five chapters covers a distinct medium: literary philosophy, painted pots, tragic drama, temple sculpture, and historiography.

I open with a chapter on Plato's *Phaedo*. I have positioned this chapter first not because Plato holds the key to the rest of the thesis, but because his literary philosophy is an obvious and undeniable example of the relationship between thinking about death and interacting with texts and objects. At least one of Plato's purposes is to provoke reflection. He does this not just in what he writes but in how he writes.[11] In the *Phaedo*, he explicitly explores what happens when we die: the immortality of the soul. It is therefore natural to think about death, and to think about death as a difficult intellectual problem, in conjunction with whatever else the form of the dialogue throws up. In this respect, the audience is primed more overtly for existential discourse than in the myth of Er (though, in fact, there are several features of the *Republic* that make death, and descent, a running theme).[12]

[10] The 'classical period' is, in any case, a construct—useful for communication and study, but ultimately more revealing of a disciplinary history than a real segment of time and practice, especially from the point of view of those who lived during it. For a relatively recent critique of some political implications of periodization from an archaeologist of the early Greek world, see Kotsonas (2016). See further Morris (1997: esp. 96-99), (2000: 77-106); Strauss (1997). The pieces by Ian Morris are discussed by Antonis Kotsonas, and cited with additional bibliography in n. 14 of his article.

[11] This has been an important theme in Plato studies: see chapter one.

[12] As others have emphasised, there is a running parallel between the *katabasis* of the myth of Er and the philosophical and mythical *katabasis* that is the wider *Republic* (and, indeed, the descent into the cave in Book 7, and other mythological *katabaseis* such as that of Odysseus), and the dialogue opens with an old man that is close to death (Cephalus) and the word κατέβην. See Segal (1978: esp. 323-24); Clay (1992: 127-28); Albinus (1998); Bakewell (2020: esp. 738-39). Geoffrey Bakewell draws out topographical details that might knit closer together the journeys made by Er

Moreover, the *Phaedo* offers an extended description of the end of a life: Socrates' life. As I noted above, the moment of Er's death is gone in a flash; 'death' in the myth of Er is largely the afterlife. In this thesis, however, I focus upon *dying*: death as an event, the cessation of life, the switch from living to dead.[13] The *Phaedo* is thus, in some ways, an ur-text for this thesis. It is about encountering 'a death' and thinking about 'death', and the connection between the two.

How does the way Plato writes 'the death of Socrates' contribute not just to the explicit topics of discussion (the immortality of the soul, i.e. what happens when we die) but to a meta-discourse about the possibility of finding an answer at all? This question permeates the chapter (and *mutatis mutandis* the rest of my thesis). Without extensively previewing the chapter's content, it is worth pulling out here a couple of themes that run through it and continue through the other chapters: distance and perspective.

First, distance. One professed goal of the *Phaedo* is to compensate for a missed experience, to offer an encounter with Socrates' death after that death has already taken place. This offer is made to an internal audience (Echecrates) but also extends to an external one (Plato's readers). The challenge is ekphrastic, and it frames the encounter in terms of presence at and absence from Socrates' final moments.[14] This

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and Socrates through lands of the dead (the road to the Piraeus passed through the Kerameikos). See further Petraki (2011) on Plato's poeticized prose (citing *katabasis* as a known poetic motif).

[13] The word 'death' encompasses a range of meanings and associations. It might include the process of dying, an ending (of life, or, figuratively, anything), the moment when life is extinguished, the ensuing state, the concept of all these together or separately, and so on. In this thesis I use the word to refer to a process of dying up to and including the point when life ceases. Note Vermeule (1981: 37) on death as a cessation in early Greece: 'death is a negative, a cessation, an inversion of life, but not a physical enemy'.

[14] For some work on the difference, otherness, desire, distance and absence that runs through ekphrasis, see Mitchell (1994: 151-81); Elsner (2004); Shapiro (2007). See further Bronfen and Goodwin (1993: 7-8) on the absence at stake in both death and representation. See also note 62.

formal set-up mirrors a play between what can and cannot be perceived at the death bed: the point of Socrates' death is invisible even to those who were there; death takes place behind a veil. Thus the distance embedded in the dialogue form (a retrospective narrative) turns attention upon the distance that defines an encounter with death: the artist's challenge reflects an epistemological challenge.

Now, perspective. I outlined above the impact of Plato's layering of multiple perspectives and multiple narrators in the myth of Er. This sort of layering is scaled up in the *Phaedo*: the scene of Socrates' death and the dialogue that accompanied it is presented within the additional wrapper of a conversation between Phaedo and Echecrates. The combination of perspectives on Socrates' death sets up a contrast between two temporal relationships with death: remembering and anticipating Socrates' death. Together, these comprise a specifically *lived* encounter with Socrates' death. This all exacerbates not just a feeling of distance, but of exteriority: in describing Socrates' death, Phaedo offers not so much an encounter with dying, as an encounter with *someone else* dying. The exteriority built into the ekphrastic form reflects and prompts reflection upon the existential and epistemological problem posed by death.

The temporal dimension of lived perspectives on death touches upon the more pervasive idea that death is a process, a concept much emphasised in scholarship on death in ancient Greece, for example in Robert Garland's *The Greek Way of Death*.[15] Garland's principle is that the process of death in ancient Greece spanned

[15] Garland (2001: 13-20). At pp. 14-16, Garland cites the same examples that I explore in this thesis (the deaths of Socrates, Ajax, Oedipus), but focuses on preparations for death rather than the point of transition. See further Vermeule (1981: 2). To some extent, death is also considered a process today. A growing area of medical attention is in palliative or 'end of life' care. This development is

a period from the onset of dying until the settling of the soul in the underworld. This process would include the point at which a body, such as the body of Er, was placed upon the pyre. A similar emphasis on process is given in anthropological models that explore some universal patterns that govern how the living deal with death: death and responses to it, like other rites of passage such as birth and marriage, involve phases of separation, transition, and incorporation.[16] What is interesting about these proposals is that they approach the idea of death via the practices and experiences of the living (by including the mourning period, for example, or the burial).[17] They frame death in terms of temporal progression, which is to say from the perspective of the living; there is a process and a narrative to the relationship between the living and the dead.

But the instance of death does matter, and to insist exclusively on the process of death dodges an important existential question: at any given point in time, is someone (Er, for example, or Socrates) dead or alive? This is prima facie a simple question, but people in classical Athens (like people today) did worry about it.[18]

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focused upon the idea that dying includes not just the final moment, the 'time of death', but the process of reaching it. More broadly, a variety of interests and practices fall within the remit of the science of thanatology, ranging from what happens to a body during and after death to the psychological aspects of grief and loss. For specialists, patients and the bereaved, death becomes one moment in the process of dying.

[16] See especially Hertz (1960: 25-86); Van Gennep (2004: 146-65, 198-94). See further Metcalf and Huntington (1991); Bloch and Parry (2012). See Engelke (2019) for a recent review of the anthropology of death (and its concern with materiality).

[17] Indeed, Robert Hertz opens his discussion of double burials (see note 16, pp. 27-28) with reflections on the contribution by the living to a collective articulation of what death is.

[18] Euripides *Alcestis* 139-47 gives a dramatic example of this problem. Alcestis is not simultaneously dead and alive at 141 (as implied in David Kovacs' translation in the Loeb); she is simultaneously living and dying (these are not perfect participles implying completion of a process, though the aorist aspect of θανοῦσαν does communicate suddenness). The process of dying is distinguishable from the instance of death, and the implied paradox draws attention to this point. Alcestis' death is unavoidable and soon. She is not, however, dead. Compare the language in which Alcestis' instance of death is represented: she could be described 'as no longer being' (ὡς οὐκέτ' οὖσαν, 387), she is 'already nothing' (οὐδέν εἰμ' ἔτι, 390), 'she is no longer' (οὐκέτ' ἔστιν, 394). This is a new state, or absence of a state, and makes all the difference. Indeed, similar language is used by other tragic figures to describe the irrevocable, devastating impact of another person's death upon their own life, a figurative death of sorts: Eur. *Hel*. 1194; Soph. *El*. 677.

Conceptually, there must be a moment of death within its process, a moment, as it were, when the scales fall.[19] Imagine if Er's relatives had cremated him on day one of his apparent death! Though the myth of Er is an exceptional story and cannot stand as an example of what dying is like in any ordinary sense,[20] it does distinguish between the process of death from the perspective of the living and the occurrence of an essential change. It is interesting that, according to Socrates' account, there was something about Er that might have suggested to the living that he had not fully 'died' by ordinary criteria: his body was still intact after ten days unlike the other bodies, which had visibly transformed into decomposing corpses. But, crucially, absence of decay was not sufficient to dissuade his family from placing him upon the pyre for cremation. Unfortunately, death cannot reliably be assessed empirically.[21] Instead, the moment of death is determined by cultural agreement. In Er's case, society's opinion was incorrect. In Socrates' case, the dialogue leaves open the possibility that his soul, if not his body, lives on. Indeed, some essential version of Socrates *does* live on in Plato's text. His death is defined and denied by the perspectives of the living.

My first chapter on the *Phaedo* raises themes that are essential to my thesis as a whole. Cultural artefacts not only reflect the problems that define real encounters with death's moment by the living, but also constitute a model of those encounters and so prompt a way of thinking about the situation of the living vis-à-vis death.

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[19] Though Garland acknowledges that 'the "spirit" departed instantly from the body', he focuses on the 'state of transfer or flux' in which it for some time remained: Garland (2001: 13).

[20] I discuss the tension between the general and the particular in the context of death further below: see pages 18-19 and, especially, chapters three and five.

[21] Philosophers, scientists and lawyers still disagree on when death occurs: cardiac failure, brainstem death, 'higher brain' death… In an absolute sense, the instance of death is a mystery. Practically, it has been solved by cultural agreement. The 'time of death' is, usually, determined by a doctor based on a range of observable criteria.

My second chapter considers the encounters with death that emerge out of interactions with painted pots. To some extent, the themes discussed above run through this chapter too, but the ways in which pots produce encounters with death and reflections upon their imaginative nature is different. Absence and presence, for example, operate differently when there is something materially there: a tangible, visible, tasteable, smellable pot. Debatably, even, a painted representation of a dying or dead body on a pot might be more palpable than a verbal description in the *Phaedo* because painted bodies are actually visible, unlike described bodies, which must be imagined.[22] This point is contentious, not least because it draws on a tradition of giving vision primacy over the other senses, especially in the context of the imagination and the mind.[23] If we weight the senses more equally, we could instead observe that painted bodies are silent, whereas we can hear Plato's Phaedo's Socrates speak. And if the *Phaedo* is read, the words must appear upon a material support: written bodies, like painted bodies, have some sort of materiality. Putting any competitive presence of visual and verbal representations to one side, what is less controversial is that they work in different ways.

It is therefore interesting to juxtapose a chapter on literary philosophy (a verbal representation that strives, in philosophical argument, towards what is abstract and immaterial) with a chapter on thinking with objects. When you can actually see a representation of a dying person, the challenge becomes less about how to show

[22] Though note Onians (1980) on an inverse relationship between representational art and the imaginative capabilities of viewers in Late Antiquity.

[23] Weight was also put upon vision, and its role in cognition, in the Graeco-Roman world: see Squire (2016: esp. 8-19). Compare the attempts in Butler and Purves (2013) to resist a hierarchy of the senses (discussed in Squire). See further Hutmacher (2019) on the socio-cultural reasons for greater emphasis on and research into vision. In terms of the relationship between vision and the imagination, White (1990) has pointed out the discrepancy between the non-pictorial nature of many uses of the imagination and the image-themed language used to describe those uses.

what should be visible (as in the *Phaedo*, where everything is imagined on the basis of words) and more about how to show what should not be visible: how do you show the cessation of life in a medium that works through visibility and material presence?[24] One option is to make a feature of concealment: on one drinking cup that I discuss in my chapter, a female figure suspends a veil above a corpse; on *lekythoi*, the centre of the field is often dominated by a blank monument, a visible substitute for an invisible corpse. Another option is to suggest a parallel between object and body and so model the existential problem faced by the living when they look at a real person dying: on one pot, one side shows a woman carrying a body, the other shows one carrying a pot. In both cases, whether looking at a real person dying or a represented person dying, viewers are voyeurs: they look from the outside.[25] Where the *Phaedo* models the existential and epistemological problem of death with ekphrastic distance and temporal perspectives, a pot can do so simply by virtue of being an object, by modelling a disjuncture between what it is, what it appears to be and what it is thought to be. Indeed, *all* objects do this (and the *Phaedo* and the concept of death are also objects).[26] What my chapter explores, then, is specifically how painted pots not only model the relationship between the living and the dying, but also draw attention to what they are doing. It is this reflexivity that highlights the role they play in imaginative meditation on the mystery of death.

One associated characteristic that gives pots an essential place in this thesis is their interactivity, their susceptibility to diverse and imaginative relations with humans.

[24] Note Stampolidēs (2014: 19) on the artistic challenge of the moment of death.
[25] See Elsner (2004: esp. 164-66) on Lacan, the desire that underpins the gaze and the phantasized object.
[26] See especially Harman (2012) on objects and their elusive nature and Harman (2005: 73-87) on the gaps between the real single object, the relations into which that object enters and the idea of the object (the intentional object) that encompasses all those relations and so is a plurality.

The multiple faces of a drinking cup, for example, invite connection and comparison: an old man drinking in the tondo might be paired with an old man dying on the exterior. A drinker can make the dead disappear (as literally beneath a shroud or the earth, or figuratively from life) by filling a cup with wine. These associations are generated by interactions between the pot and its handlers, and orchestrate temporal perspectives on death (an old man drinking will also die, or perhaps he remembers a death) and transposability of identity (one old man dies like another, and vice versa). Visual analogies generate an encounter with death as a generalising force: death is the end of the self; all the dying become alike. They also turn attention on the generalisation inherent in imagining what death is and might be like. What Plato's *Phaedo*'s Socrates strives to achieve with logic (an abstract conception of death that holds for all), pots prompt with repetitions and correspondences.

It might seem unfashionable to point out that objects are *objects* in the context of human imaginative thought (especially small objects that can be picked up and turned over, objects that are functional). Recent scholarship has striven to de-centre the human, to dissolve the distinction between subject and object, and to demonstrate that objects exist independently from human interaction and cannot be reduced to what humans make of them.[27] But, as pointed out in the previous paragraph, it is precisely this way of thinking about objects that makes them such powerful agents in human processes of thinking about death. It is the combination

[27] See note 26 for object-oriented theory. For new materialist critique, see Meskell (1996), (2000); Joyce (2005); Sofaer (2006: esp. 64-88); Barad (2008); Coole and Frost (2010). See further note 59 and also Cairns (2016); Telò and Mueller (2018); Bianchi, Brill and Holmes (2019) for some encounters between ancient Graeco-Roman material and post-humanist and new materialist thinking. Compare Hall (2018) on the ongoing value of Marxist theory.

of their inexhaustibly mysterious nature and their propensity to generate all sorts of human responses (in full acknowledgement that these responses do not, and cannot, define their essence) that mediates exploratory thought and epistemological reflection.[28]

What does tragedy add to this picture? My third chapter explores encounters with death in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. In a loose sense, the *OC* makes death, or rather one specific death (Oedipus' death), its subject. Oedipus' body is visibly, materially present on stage for most of the play, forming a static focal point about which the action unfurls. Indeed, much of the drama (politically, as well as spatially) concerns his body, and one major question is whether he is destined to die in the place and time frame of the play. Oedipus' body is a centre piece of the action. It is therefore remarkable that he leaves the stage when the time comes for his death (as in many surviving Greek tragedies). Why not make use of the chance to show death with a real body? Putting questions of feasibility to one side (how, for example, to have a body slaughtered with an axe, trampled by a chariot, or simply disappear), and also the question of imaginative thrill (was it considered more exciting to hear a vivid description?), one more philosophical answer might be that seeing a body does not add much to an encounter with the moment of death. This, at least, appears to be one implication in the *Phaedo*. The presence of bodies on stage is meaningful in the build-up, where Sophocles makes use of multiple persons and voices on stage to communicate a divergence between the perspectives of the living and the dying. A corpse also forms an important prop in the aftermath,

[28] Though I draw here on contemporary theory, this way of thinking about objects is not alien to classical Athens: see e.g. Steiner (2001: esp. 136-56) on the paradoxical associations that statues carried for archaic and classical audiences, and 'the image's versatility as cognitive tool', including in meditation on the dead.

serving as evidence of death and motivation for emotional response and further action (usually, but in fact not in the *OC*; see below). But, arguably, an encounter with the moment of death gains as little from seeing an acting body 'dying' on stage as it would from seeing a real one. Instead, Oedipus' death is reported by a messenger, and so defined by ekphrasis, with all the distance, perspective and exteriority that I discussed above in relation to the *Phaedo*.

Perhaps, though, the most significant contribution of this third chapter is the pressure it puts on the relationship between death and exemplarity. If the *Phaedo* is the ur-text in my thesis, the *OC* is the exemplary one. Where the painted images of Priam and Phoenix on a drinking cup provoke reflection on the similarity, the substitutability, of one death with another, the death of Oedipus on Sophocles' tragic stage offers itself as a (complicated) model for any mortal's death. This is partly because what happens to Oedipus is, like all deaths, obscure. It is also because he carries the weight of his own tradition: he is the man who, like all men, does not know who he is or where he is. He is ordinary. But he is also extraordinary. His death is unusual because it is the subject of a prophecy, and mysterious because it defies expectations. It is unclear, in fact, whether he 'dies' at all in the ordinary sense (whatever that is), though it is plain that his ordinary life does come to an end. Perhaps this is another reason why he dies offstage: it enables a miraculous disappearance, and also destabilises confidence in his death in the absence of empirical proof: he leaves no body, denying the opportunity for mourning, the normal response to a death. The typical *and* singular nature of Sophocles' Oedipus' demise puts a question mark over the possibility that there might ever be such a

thing as an ordinary death.[29] This dives deep into the epistemological and ontological problems surrounding dying. As observed above, the tension between individuality and generality appears in other media: on pots, for example, which draw attention to substitutability, and in Plato's *Phaedo*, where Socrates is offered for emulation in death as well as life (see also my discussion of Thucydides' account of the plague below). But the appearance of mythological characters on a tragic stage, two traditional forms of instruction for the Athenian *polis*, constitutes an especially potent combination.

Death is unquestionably relevant, if not a primary subject, in the examples that make up my first three chapters. In my fourth chapter, I take a more provocative approach: what does it take to notice death in temple sculpture? I focus on the west frieze of the temple of Athena Nike, a series of stone blocks with sculpted representations of a battle between men from two polities that cannot be conclusively identified. This frieze, like the temple of which it used to form a part, has been firmly and almost exclusively interpreted in classical scholarship as a thing of beauty, a symbol of victory and Athenian supremacy. My approach in this chapter is to think instead in terms of plausible possibilities, possibilities that include meditation on death and defeat.[30] This is similar to my approach elsewhere in this thesis: sculpted objects, like pots, are readily interactive objects, and so rich mediators of imaginative thought.[31] But the sorts of relations between a frieze and

[29] This tension between the general and particular has been explored in scholarship on exemplarity. On exemplarity and the Graeco-Roman world, see Cairns (2014); Lowrie and Lüdermann (2015); Langlands (2015), (2018); Newby (2016: esp. 3-4, 320-47); Roller (2015), (2018: esp. 4-23); Rood, Atack and Phillips (2020: 145-68). On exemplarity and our reception of the Graeco-Roman world, see Goldhill (1994), (2017: esp. 259-62); Güthenke (2020). See further chapter three.
[30] Compare Griffin (2009: *passim* but esp. 44-49, 90-95, 103-43) on death (and the gods) as a vibrant and dreadful fabric against and out of which the Homeric epics constitute their heroes.
[31] I explore this elsewhere with Xavier Buxton in relation to the so-called 'Mourning Athena' stele: Clifford and Buxton (Forthcoming a).

its viewers are different from those offered by a pot (especially when the frieze is in situ on a temple). Some notable differences are size, visibility, and tangibility: you cannot turn a temple round in your hands or peer inside. A frieze is also less mobile. The west frieze may have crossed seas to its present home in the British Museum, but it does not move easily from place to place, or setting to setting (and some feel, as with many antiquities, that it is out of place, that its true home is Athens). It is not just the frieze itself that might prompt meditation on death, but the dialogue between it and the wider temple, the political, religious and cultural site of the Acropolis, and a cultural tapestry of objects and ideas past and present. My chapter explores the generative power of the frieze within this infusion.

In addition to setting the frieze within a cultural frame (a more extensive frame than could ever be fully accommodated within one study), I also zoom in upon its material and formal aspects, characteristics that are broadly true of any sculpted stone, and that shape encounters with death in its medium. One of these characteristics is the coincidence of content and form that is constituted by representational art.[32] The play between, for example, seeing stone incisions and seeing a man sprawled behind a rock, provokes a similar dynamic to ekphrastic speech: there is distance and perspective at play in a sculpted representation of a dying soldier, just as in a description of Socrates on his death bed. In this sense, threads that I introduced at the start of this introduction continue in this chapter.

[32] The nature of this coincidence and the experience of viewers in response to it has been much discussed. Note, especially, Wittgenstein (1953: 193-229, esp. 194 (II.xi)) and Gombrich (1968: esp. 4-5) on 'seeing-as' (an experience in which viewers must alternate between seeing content and form), and Wollheim (1980: 137-51), (1998: 221-22), (2003) on 'seeing-in' (an experience in which content and form can be seen together). The chapters in Kemp and Mras (2016) discuss the relations between these approaches. See further Neer (2002) and (2010) on a play between presence and representation in Greek art, with shifts in emphasis over time, including towards the end of the archaic period. See further chapters two and four.

But, in addition, there is a quality to stone that makes it a distinctively apt medium for mediating existential reflection. It is, with due regard to new materialist studies, relatively still, inert, hard, and cold from the point of view of a human subject.[33] A representation of a stone corpse (and, indeed, a stone body that is apparently alive) has some attributes in common with a real one. Sculpted stone thus prompts reflection on the ontology of death not just in what it shows, but in what it is, and so accommodates a particular sort of reflexivity.

This brings me to my final chapter on historiography. I focus on Thucydides' description of the first outbreak of the plague of Athens (*History* 2.47-54), and I treat this as exemplary of a wider historiographical and existential discourse.[34] Two themes that recur in this chapter, but through a distinctively historiographical lens, are exteriority and the tension between the general and the particular. These come to the fore in Thucydides' empirical approach to disease (especially one that was often fatal), which highlights the challenge of accessing either a patient's experience of disease or a general account of disease from observation and description of examples. In a different but comparable way from, for example, Plato's *Phaedo*, Thucydides' description of the plague models the conceptual problem that governs my thesis: how to understand what dying is and is like from the perspective of the living. Still more interesting in the context of the preceding

[33] See note 27: in general, new materialist studies seek to counteract assumptions that matter is, among other things, passive and 'inert'. Compare, however, Bassi (2018: esp. 36-38) for a materialist approach to corpses and their dramatic representations in Greek tragedy that emphasises their 'inanimate or post-animate' status. Karen Bassi's point that corpses confront members of an audience with their ignorance vis-à-vis death is highly pertinent to this thesis. See further Hutchinson (2022) on the thought-provoking relations between people (human) and rock/rocks (non-human) in ancient literature.

[34] Compare Lloyd (2003: 121-27): G. E. R. Lloyd considers Thucydides' description of the plague as 'a model for objective—"scientific"—historiography' and, generally, the influence of disease on ancient Greek imagination, but does not delve into the epistemological and methodological anxieties that might accompany those parallels.

chapters is how the existential and epistemological problems that Thucydides explores in his account of plague intersect with his methodological reflections on his historiography.

I conclude the chapter by exploring how Thucydides' description of plague within his account of war interacts with a wider tradition of plague, war and existential discourse. His Athenians die like cattle, as Homer's Greeks (implicitly) die like mules, as one painter's Niobids die like an antelope. His language is figurative and participates in a way of thinking about death that is mediated not just by one crafted association of ideas, but by a pervasive cultural association.[35] Perhaps Thucydides could not help but talk of death from plague in these terms, perhaps he more self-consciously points towards the backdrop that shapes what it was like for him to encounter plague, death and war in classical Athens, and what it means for him to reproduce those encounters for his readers. Accidental or deliberate, the way in which he generates an encounter with death provokes reflection on the extensive and shifting cultural artefact through, within and against which reflection takes place.[36] This discussion thus ends the thesis with a more holistic vision of how reflection on death might be mediated not (or not only) by the texts and material culture of classical Athens in isolation, but by each in dialogue with one another.

[35] See Lakoff (1993); Gibbs (1994); Lakoff and Johnson (2003) on the relationship between figurative language (specifically metaphor) and thought. On the complexities of this connection, see Pinker (2007: 235-78). On the generative power of metaphor, see Black (1954/55), (1993: esp. 35-39); Ricoeur (1991: esp. 85); Harman (2005: 101-24). There is a compounding effect when figurative language operates in and through literature and art, particularly when they feature mythology. On the roles played by myth and metaphor in imaginative processes in Romantic poetry, see Karadas (2008). On the disorienting impact of mythological tales on their audience (shaping, for example, an '"Achillized" perspective' on courage), see Lear (2006: 29-30). See further Detienne (1986: 103-23); Morgan (2000); Cairns (2014).

[36] See Fearn (Forthcoming a) on the reflection provoked by Gorgias' *Helen* on the cultural media through which imaginative processes function: writing and mythology.

What can we take from this dialogue? The central claim in this thesis is that, yes, all these different media mediate meditation on death differently, but, that said, *they all participate* in processes of existential reflection. I began this discussion, and will begin the main body of the thesis, with Plato. That Plato should explore the epistemological problem presented by death is not surprising. What is perhaps surprising and certainly interesting is that media and genres that are not ordinarily considered to be philosophical, and that largely predate Plato's writings, also reveal and provoke a similar sort of meditation. These media formed part of a range of social interactions, on the Acropolis, in the theatre, in the symposium, at the grave. Existential reflection ran deeper in fifth-century Athens than a group of elite intellectuals that self-identified as philosophers. It permeated and was born out of lived interactions in multiple communities within the polis. Plato, then, responded to and reflected upon a century (at least) of interest in an existential problem. He engaged with a cultural phenomenon in a self-made genre that staged lived interactions and the philosophy that emerges from them.

But two further claims flow from my central one: one wider, the other historically specific. The first is that the claim in this thesis is not restricted to death. Death is, as it were, a prism through which to examine more general epistemological reflection in this period on the relationship between the knowable and the unknowable. The problem posed by death is an example of a wider existential problem: how to extrapolate a subjective experience from empirical observation, and the general from the specific. My instinct, and this is my third and more tentative claim, is that the intensity of culturally-mediated existential reflection in this period is historically significant and fits with narratives in the scholarship of

intellectual and cultural developments and changing attitudes to death. Though it is difficult to make a strong claim of this sort in a thesis that focuses wholly on one period, I will explore what such a claim might look like in the conclusion to my thesis (see also below on some methodological challenges raised by this question).

METHODOLOGY

Selectivity is central to the arrangement and contents of my thesis and my approach to the ancient material (five media and genres for study in five chapters, each focusing on one or a few examples). It would not be possible to undertake the sort of close analysis that I pursue in the chapters towards a range of media without making some discriminatory choices. The flip side of this is that I cover only a fraction of the range of media available for study from a period of one hundred years or so, and so offer a curated sample of cultural encounters with death. Noticeably missing, for example, are studies of funerary monuments and inscriptions, lyric poetry, archaeological sites, law-court speeches, and other drama such as comedy. I have striven above all for diversity, and for a balance between visual/material and verbal/textual material. This is not an arbitrary choice, but it probably reveals more about disciplinary boundaries (art/literature/philosophy/history) and my desire to bring them together into a multi-media study, than about how encounters with death might have been differentiated in ancient Athens. Indeed, my very selection and categorisation by medium to some extent reinforces disciplinary boundaries by presenting, for example, Plato's Phaedo's account of Socrates' death and Sophocles' Messenger's account of Oedipus' death as different objects for analysis and comparison because the one is

branded philosophy and the other theatre-literature. This shapes the cultural picture around not just matter, form and context, but also existing specialisms within the discipline, rather than, say, audience, real/mythical, public/private, male/female or some other (in)conceivable differentiation.[37] Nevertheless, there are merits to organisation by medium. This turns the lens closely upon the artefacts themselves, and the distinctive sorts of encounter they offer qua artefacts. It also enables me to cover a broad range of contexts (including those just mentioned) while also looking closely at case studies. Finally, it allows me to contribute to existing and topical fields of interest in classical scholarship, such as the relationship between images and words, and the central role played by objects and matter as agents in the world.[38]

The selectivity at play *within* each chapter raises further methodological points. Close analysis of case studies is essential because my topic requires detailed probing into the interactions between visual and verbal culture and its viewers and handlers, listeners and readers. In my study of pots, for example, space is required for analysis of how one object's style, subject, shape and function interact to generate diverse and expansive encounters, including reflections on death. The goal is to be inclusive, to accommodate plausible possibilities (see especially chapter four) rather than to trace a pattern between some details. This means that in each chapter I concentrate upon one or just a few examples. One of Plato's dialogues in a chapter on literary philosophy; a limited selection of cups and funerary jugs; one

[37] I note especially Foucault (2002) on 'what it is impossible to think' and his intellectual legacy. Since Michel Foucault, it is impossible not to think of the cultural systems that order our lives and ideas. However, see Güthenke and Brookes (2018) for reflections on the parameters of the discipline (especially tensions between inclusivity and manageability) and more optimistic, strategic and imaginative suggestions for its re-conceptualisation.
[38] See below on key literature here and where my thesis sits within it.

of Sophocles' plays in a chapter on tragic drama; one bit of a temple; a short extract that covers plague from Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War.

This has different repercussions in each chapter since it is a different thing to study one play and to study, say, one pot. Whereas the *OC* was designed to be performed, and was actually performed, for the *polis*, and so was placed under the scrutiny of thousands of pairs of Athenian eyes and ears, one pot might have been viewed by only a few, and might never have stood as an object for contemplation.[39] And where a text such as the *Phaedo* was selected, preserved, treasured by generations of scholars from antiquity to the present, some pots survived by accident, or if intentionally preserved in a grave may have nevertheless resurfaced fortuitously (though some ancient plays, especially fragments of plays, have also survived by chance).[40] And it is another thing again to look at one bit of a whole: part of a temple; part of a history (though this point could be made more extensively, since the text of the *OC* represents only a part of a drama, and excludes, for example, music, props and dance and the play itself represents one of four submitted by Sophocles, and so on, and a pot might be a part of a polymorphous set, gathered, used, or arranged for a symposium or burial).

Differences aside, what the case study approach puts pressure on, and accentuates, is the exemplarity inherent not just in studies of the ancient world, but in our

[39] In fact, in both cases, encounters might take place at individual and collective levels. It is widely emphasised, for example, that Greek tragedy appealed not just to the audience as individual members, but as a citizenry; see e.g. Goldhill (1987) on the Great Dionysia context. See further Budelmann (2000a: ch. 1) on how Sophocles' language challenges spectators and so generates a collective response qua audience. The extent to which a pot invited a collective response would have depended, in part, upon its type; a *krater*, for instance, was a shared object, and so used and seen by symposiasts as a group as well as individually.

[40] See Elsner (2017) on the impact of transmission on our reception of the ancient world. See further Elsner (2015) on the different hermeneutic challenges presented by words and images in antiquity.

relationship with antiquity.[41] To what extent can one example (or a selection of examples) stand for the group, whether one pot for the corpus, or an assortment of works for the totality of classical Athenian production? And how great is the distance between my interactions with a selection of texts and material culture over the last few years and the relations they have had not just in classical Athens but in times and places since?[42] The disjuncture between generality and particularity is characteristic of classical study. What is particularly stimulating in the context of this thesis, however, is that the exemplarity at play in my methodology models the epistemological problem at the heart of my subject matter by enacting the possibilities and limitations of an empirical approach. To what extent can one person's death, whether in real life or in art, stand for all deaths, for death in general? Can we compare one death with another or is every death idiosyncratic? These are anxieties raised by movement from the specific to the general; they overshadow attempts to formulate an argument based on selective evidence just as much as attempts to figure out death by studying other people.[43]

Let us consider, finally, one story that might have been lost in my approach: an account of change over time, either within the classical period or else from, for example, the archaic period to the classical.[44] This is partly a result of selective

[41] See note 29.
[42] The distance between our perspectives and preconceptions and those of ancient Athenians has been much emphasised and is relevant in all areas of engagement with the ancient world. For a classic methodological reflection on the problem of distance in the study of ancient Greek attitudes to death, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1995: 1-9). Compare Neer (2010: 12-13) in support of comprehensive close analysis: 'Whose eyes should we use if not our own?' (p. 13). See further Goldhill (2012: 3-9) on the challenge of integrating detailed readings of Sophocles with an appreciation of the rich history that shapes our reception of his work.
[43] Emily Vermeule touches upon this link in her metaphorical description of art and scholarship: Vermeule (1979: 4), 'Poets, critics, historians, archaeologists, artists spend their working lives as necromancers, raising the dead in order to enter into their imaginations and experience'.
[44] For a more evolutionary approach (spanning a time period of two million years or so, and not focusing on Graeco-Roman antiquity except insofar as it, presumably, falls within the 'age of the

study and the fragile exemplarity of each text and object. It is difficult, and possibly misleading, to draw large inferences from a few examples, and it is impossible to draw any inferences about difference from one. It is also inhibited by my arrangement of chapters. In opening with Plato's *Phaedo*, I have deliberately placed my chapters out of chronological sequence. This avoids an impression of linear development from one medium to another. It also invigorates comparison by medium as opposed to by time, since it is the role played by visual and verbal culture in ontological and epistemological reflection on death (not changing attitudes towards or beliefs about death) that is at the heart of my thesis. I am offering not so much a story, as a picture…[45]

As to where the picture might fit, I have sketched out some tentative ideas in the conclusion to my thesis. There, I pull together some features of the classical period that have been considered to be distinctive from what came before: this includes intense intellectual activity, the so-called revolution in art, and viewing, and changing attitudes towards death. It is plausible, if perhaps too tidy, that these go hand in hand.[46] Indeed, there would be value in pursuing more studies such as this with a focus on periods adjacent to the classical and, for that matter, on periods and cultures from altogether different times and places. Though such studies lie outside my scope here, they might unlock some stimulating points of comparison.

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city' category), see Kellehear (2007) on how large-scale transformations in social environment have influenced the recognition and experience of dying. See further note 10.

[45] This formulation taps into a long and fraught debate on the relative properties and strengths of the visual and verbal arts, as epitomised in Lessing (1836). See note 62.

[46] Indeed, Morris (1989a) expressed scepticism as to the empirical basis for Sourvinou-Inwood's proposed large-scale shift in attitudes to death between early Greece and the classical period. Nevertheless, see Walter-Karydi (2015: esp. 127-34) on the congruence between the advent of contrapposto in sculpture and heightened meditation (through art) on the relationship between the dead and the bereaved and on the death of the self and the other.

Here, the universality of death's mystery is an important premise. In this respect, classical Athens itself operates as a case study for a more general phenomenon of culturally mediated existential thought. This raises not just the problem of methodological exemplarity, but polemics surrounding a western tradition of exemplary classicism.[47] But what makes classical Athens a fertile period for this inquiry is the sheer number of forms of art and literature that emerge.[48] The range of distinctive media, several of which constitute new enduring genres, is peculiarly conducive to comparative study.

CONTRIBUTION

There are, broadly, two ways in which this thesis contributes to classical scholarship: subject matter and methodology. These are intertwined, and I envisage that my primary contribution will be in combining the two. It is my treatment of visual and verbal culture as generative not just reflective of ideas and my balanced consideration of art and text that permits a variegated picture of how visual and verbal culture mediates meditation on death to emerge.

[47] The history, present and future of the discipline of classics is under scrutiny, with critical attention falling not just upon the hierarchies and boundaries of the discipline (questions, for example, of canonicity), but also upon its cultural, political and ideological reverberations and its relationships with white supremacy, power structures and colonisation. See, for example: Goff (2005) on classics and colonialism; Vasunia (2013) on the relationship between the British Empire in India and the discipline of classics; Formisano and Kraus (2018) on the implications of canonicity for the discipline; Zuckerberg (2018) on the reception of classical antiquity within an online far-right community. See further the reviews of Vasunia and Zuckerberg by Mathura Umachandran: Umachandran (2014) and (2020).

[48] Albeit not exclusively, or even first, in Athens.

Death has long commanded interest amongst classical scholars and the bibliography is wide ranging and vast.[49] Within its remit fall, for example, archaeological studies of funerary sites, material and remains,[50] investigations into funerary rites and responses to death,[51] and histories of ancient ideas, attitudes and beliefs, such as what happens after death.[52] (Moreover, much scholarship draws on funerary material not so much for what it might tell us about death, but for what it might tell us about the living and socio-political-cultural discourse.)[53] What much of this work

[49] For an overview of trends in scholarship on death in the ancient Greek world, see Garland (2001: x-xvii, xxii-xxiii); Mirto (2012: 155-67). Maria Serena Mirto synthesises a range of subjects and associated scholarship relating to ancient Greek death.

[50] For some recent archaeological approaches to death that draw on material from a range of places and times, see Stutz and Tarlow (2013). See further, on excavations of the ancient Athenian Kerameikos, Kübler (1976); Knigge (1991); Baziotopoulou-Valavani (2002).

[51] See, for example, Kurtz and Boardman (1971: esp. 91-161) on burial customs; Stupperich (1977) on the state funeral and private graves (against the political backdrop of classical Athens); Shapiro (1991) on the iconography of mourning; Alexiou (2002) on the ritual lament. See further Garland (1989) on evidence and possible explanations for Greek funerary legislation.

[52] The focus of scholarship on ideas, attitudes and beliefs relating to death in ancient Greece is usually not so much the event of death as its material, ritual and other-worldly aftermath. Key studies that draw on ancient texts and material culture to explore Greek ideas about and attitudes towards death include Vermeule (1979); Sourvinou-Inwood (1987) (an interesting study in which she distinguishes images that present death from the perspectives of the self or the other), (1995); Garland (2001: esp. 13-20). There are also more targeted monographs, such as Peifer (1989); Oakley (2004); Giudice (2015); Walter-Karydi (2015); Man (2020). On belief in the 'soul' and the afterlife and ancient eschatological discourse see, for example, Rohde (1925); Bremmer (1983: 70-124); Diez de Velasco (1995); Albinus (2000); Edmonds (2004), (2021); Retief and Cilliers (2006: 44-48); Graf and Johnston (2013); Marlow, Pollmann and Van Noorden (2021: 7-10). See further Antonaccio (1995) on archaeological evidence for ancestor worship and hero cult. Notably, Radcliffe E. Edmonds III explores in his book how the other world is made in a mirror image (of sorts) of the world of the living. Implicitly, what happens after death presents a similar, but not identical, epistemological challenge to the living as the event itself. Similarly, Francisco Diez de Velasco emphasises the imaginary nature of ancient Greek articulations of the journey of the dead to the beyond; Harrisson (2018), too, approaches afterlife as a product of the imagination, but the volume is focused on *what* ancient Greeks imagined as opposed to how they went about that process and their epistemological reflections. On supernatural interactions between the living and the dead, see Johnston (1999); Ogden (2008), (2019). Sarah Iles Johnston does not delve into any epistemological anxiety that might have accompanied interactions between the living and the dead; this may in part be because she is concerned to counteract a neglect in the scholarship by embracing the possibility of irrational belief amongst the Greeks. Daniel Ogden, too, does not explore this possibility, though he acknowledges (in passing) that some might have condemned necromancy as fraudulent.

[53] One of Ian Morris' contributions to death archaeology was a shift from more descriptive accounts of funerary material to large-scale consideration of how burial evidence (and the ritual system of which it comprised a part) might allow us to develop models of shifting social structure and perceptions of it: see especially Morris (1989b), (1992). Note further Parker Pearson (2003: 4), whose book 'is not so much about the dead themselves as the living who buried them' and, more recently, Robb (2013: 441), 'we have never had an "archaeology of death"' (as opposed to archaeologies of 'already dead persons'). John Robb's chapter proposes an archaeological approach to the problem of what dying is and means. Some further examples that use mortuary evidence to

has in common with my study is an interest in the living, in the relationships that living ancient Greeks had with death and the dead. In this respect, my thesis very much sits within this wide field, and the field provides an important backdrop to it.

One important point of difference between my study and much existing work on ancient Greek death is that I am interested not so much in what ancient Athenians did or thought about death as how they thought about it. Though the epistemological implications of death do surface in some of the above studies, they are rarely the focus. In Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood's study *Reading Greek Death to the End of the Classical Period*, for example, she draws attention to the mediated nature of the account of the underworld in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, but her purpose is to contrast it with the comparatively direct account in Book 24 (where events are recounted by the poet with no intermediary narrator).[54] The contrast supports her argument that shifting beliefs in and attitudes towards death are recoverable from the Homeric epics. A key difference between her purpose and mine, then, is that she was interested in where Athenians got to on death; I am interested in how they got there.

access the (historical) living include, Humphreys (1980) on what tomb groupings and burial layouts might reveal about the priorities of the living vis-à-vis the community or the family; Houby-Nielsen (1995) on the expression of age and gender ideologies in burial practice in the Archaic and Classical Kerameikos; Snodgrass (1998) on what rural burial might reveal about relationships between the living and the land; Gray (2011) on the insights funerary evidence might give into the experience of being Milesians, an ethnic minority community, in Hellenistic and Roman Athens; Sjöberg (2019) on what analysis of the *prothesis* might reveal about female identities. Particularly interesting in the context of my thesis is Loraux (1982), (1986a: esp. 328-38): though she was more interested in life than in death (specifically in the constitution of an Athenian idea of Athens), she explored the generative power of the funeral speech and the intersection between a cultural form and the imagination.

[54] Sourvinou-Inwood (1995: 14-16, 99) on Homer's oblique articulation of the 'unseeable realm of death' in Odysseus' narration to the Phaeacians, by contrast with the events in *Odyssey* 24, which are 'given the authority of the primary narrator'. This narrator ('the Continuator'), composing later, was unaware of the inconsistency owing to his different eschatological perspective.

Specifically, I am interested in a culturally-mediated epistemology of death, in the role played by culture in generating and shaping encounters with death, and in provoking reflections upon that process. In this respect, it is not aspects of death, attitudes to death, or responses to death that are at the centre of my thesis, but rather the verbal and visual culture itself and what it does. This is where a divergence in subject matter overlaps with a divergence in methodology, a difference in treatment of the material.

The driving interest of many studies of death in ancient Greece is in the representational properties of the material they consider: they are interested in what it can reveal about ancient customs, attitudes or beliefs (images and texts as reflective of norms, structures and ideas) as opposed to the more generative role that culture has in mediating thought, in shaping ideas and involving Athenians in processes of meditation. Culture becomes a source, rather than a point of encounter. In this respect, more similar to mine in approach is work by Elena Walter-Karydi, Nathaniel Jones, Nathan Arrington and Michael Squire on material culture, by Victoria Wohl and Karen Bassi on text, and by Seth Estrin on the two.[55] Though less recent, the contributions of Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux and Robin Osborne are also key, both in approach to the material and in attention to the existential reflection that might be prompted by the formal features of verbal and visual art.[56]

[55] Arrington (2015), (2018); Jones (2015); Walter-Karydi (2015: pt. 4, esp. 331-34); Estrin (2016), (2018); Squire (2018b); Bassi (2018); Wohl (2018). See further Turner (2016) for a bigger picture material-culture-led discussion of 'seeing, envisioning and reflecting on death' in the Graeco-Roman world.

[56] Frontisi-Ducroux (1986), (1988: 34-35), (1989: 160-81), (1995: 82-94); Osborne (1988). The work of Jean-Pierre Vernant is also important: see especially Vernant (1983: 305-20) on the *kolossos* as a cultural object that gives visible form to the invisible and so to an idea, the life of the deceased in the beyond. See further Vernant (1991c: 167-68) on the *eidolon*, another double that simultaneously manifests presence and absence.

As the recent flurry of publications cited in the previous paragraph reflects, the role played by funerary art in mediating thanatological meditation is an area of renewed interest, with attention increasingly turning towards Greek material.[57] This is partly driven by the concurrence of sensory, affective, aesthetic and embodied approaches to ancient material with an object-oriented turn and an interest in the relations between things and people.[58] New materialist studies, in particular, have redressed an imbalance in scholarly (and more widespread) conceptions of 'subject' and 'object' by attending to the agency and liveliness of matter and the permeability between humans and their environment.[59] Indeed, many of the pieces cited above explore culturally-mediated encounters with death and reflections upon it by examining affective and sensory relations between human and non-human.[60] My focus on cultural mediation of meditation on death thus joins several wider trends in classical studies in exploring the potentialities of visual and verbal material to involve its audience in experience and thought.[61]

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[57] Compare the volume of work on Roman art, for example Huskinson (1998); Elsner and Huskinson (2011); Elsner and Hung (2012); Platt (2011: esp. 335-93), (2012); Birk (2013: 57-58); Vout (2014); Elsner (2018b); Trimble (2018).

[58] See notes 26, 27 and 59. For further sensory, affective and embodied approaches to ancient material: Halliwell (2002), (2012); Neer (2010); Porter (2010); Peponi (2012); Gaifman (2013); Bradley and Butler (2014-2018), especially the chapter by Susanne Turner within the *Sight and the Ancient Senses* volume; Grethlein (2017); Liebert (2017); Budelmann and Phillips (2018); Gaifman, Platt and Squire (2018); Grethlein, Huitink and Tagliabue (2020). For thing and object theories (specifically on relations between humans and things, things and ideas, objects and objects), see Brown (2004); Gumbrecht (2004); Harman (2005: esp. 230-34). Jonas Grethlein's claim that there has been a disparity between the enthusiasm with which different disciplines have, in recent scholarship, embraced these ideas is thought-provoking in the context of this multi-media study: Grethlein (2017: 14).

[59] See note 27. I note especially Meskell (1996: esp. 11-14), who engages with individuals and their lived, embodied, experiences at the point of death through death archaeology. She also outlines prior archaeological approaches to bodies (for example as artefact or reflection of society). Other examples that are pertinent to death studies include Hallam and Hockey (2001) on the relationships between death, memory and material culture (ranging from medieval to contemporary Western societies); Newby and Toulson (2019) on the roles played by material objects in experience of grief and expression of mourning (see the editors' introduction for an emotion-oriented historiography of death studies, and the afterword by Douglas Davies on the material- and death-turn).

[60] See note 55.

[61] Indeed, this topic is also of interest outside classical studies. Closest in interest and focus to my thesis is D. Vance Smith's publication on how English literature of the Middle Ages prompts reflection on the impossibility of describing dying, a finitude that lies beyond experience, and on

One striking feature of the studies included above is that they fall, predominantly, into either textual or material camps. This is often because they focus on one object type or genre (*lekythoi* or *stelai*, for example, or the lament), but even when studies are deliberately more diverse, such as Robin Osborne's 1988 article on a range of funerary pots and sculpted monuments (cited above), they rarely give equal weight to verbal and visual material. This means that much opportunity for comparison is lost, and with it a more nuanced picture of how culture mediates meditation. The relationship between art and text in the classical world has been extensively studied over the last few decades,[62] with insistent calls for less segregation.[63] To this effect, recent edited volumes such as Zahra Newby and Ruth Toulson's *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* have sought to include a spread of visual and verbal material and approaches to it.[64] Though rarer, some monographs also offer a balanced picture (though not on death).[65] There is, then, room for a cohesive look at what different media do differently for death. In fact, this is not just true of visual and verbal media, but also of different forms within those

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the imaginative possibilities offered by literature in the face of that problem: Vance Smith (2019). Also important here, though not focused on death, is recent work that explores the mediating role played by cultural artefacts from classical Athens in processes of imagination: see especially Fearn (Forthcoming a), and other chapters in that volume.

[62] See for example Goldhill and Osborne (1994); Rutter and Sparkes (2000), especially chapters by Ruth Bardel and Karen Stears; Small (2003); Newby and Leader-Newby (2007); Squire (2009); Elsner (2015). See further work on ekphrasis, for example Mitchell (1994: 151-81); Elsner (2002), (2010); Heffernan (2004); Goldhill (2007); Webb (2009); Zeitlin (2013); Elsner and Squire (2016); Krieger (2019).

[63] See especially Elsner (2015) on the fragmentation of the Samos stele at Athens, not just into physical pieces but into disparate publications according to scholarly categorisations.

[64] Newby and Toulson (2019) is deliberately multi-disciplinary. See further Hope and Huskinson (2011), which brings together several media and genres from the Roman world in the study of the process of death and dying, specifically through the lens of memory and mourning; Elsner and Hung (2012), which offers a cross-regional collection of studies of Roman and Chinese sarcophagi (see the editorial and commentaries for comparative discussions).

[65] Compare the extensive work on art and literature by T. B. L. Webster, for example Webster (1939a), and more recent examples such as Squire (2009); Platt (2011); Grethlein (2017). These do not focus on death. For shorter pieces with visual and verbal analysis and a more thanatological theme, see Frontisi-Ducroux (1986); Estrin (2016), (2018); Brown (2018). Indeed, though the questions he asked of the material were different, Ian Morris advocated a more multi-media approach to the study of death-ritual: Morris (1992: 200-1).

categories such as philosophy and history, or even between one pot type and another. Though my contribution here is therefore partly one of methodology *tout court*, in that my thesis combines a range of media with close analysis, that approach is also what builds a distinctive contribution to scholarship on death and on the relationship between culture and thinking.

This brings me to one final but important merit of a media-centred (and, indeed, a multi-media) study: eclecticism. My thesis accommodates a variegated picture. In this, it again differs in purpose and product from some influential accounts of Greek attitudes to death, which sought to uncover a cohesive ancient Athenian way of thinking (albeit one that might change over time).[66] But to the extent that encounters with death are mediated, they are multiply idiosyncratic, crystallised in variable and ephemeral interactions.[67] They are defined by mystery and uncertainty. An appreciation of this uncertainty was a strength of Emily Vermeule's study: a 'derivative and arbitrary selection of aspects of Greek death' (her words).[68] Some, however, have found this uncertainty troubling. Consider, for instance, the following selection from Nicholas Richardson's review in 1981:

> This is a curious book, learned and often eloquent, but somehow unsure of itself, as though the author had embarked on these strange seas of thought and let the wind take her where it would. As 'Longinus' said of the tales of Odysseus, it seems to be a kind of 'wandering in the realms of the fabulous'. For all its melancholy, Browne's *Urne Buriall* struck a note of firmness and confidence in face of death which may, after all, be closer in spirit to the nobility of classical attitudes, as mirrored in the

[66] Consider, for example, Sourvinou-Inwood (1981), (1983), (1995); Garland (2001: esp. xv-xvi). Compare Osborne (1988: 1) and, more recently, Arrington (2015: esp. 13-18) on individual and collective memories.
[67] Compare Potts (2002: 17, 21-22) on the idiosyncrasies of human responses to death and the merits of 'reading widely across geographical and temporal boundaries'. See further Snodgrass (2009) for words of caution against attempts to generalise even about burial in the classical Greek *polis*.
[68] Vermeule (1981: x).

> speeches of the *Iliad*, or the quiet dignity of a fifth-century Attic tombstone.[69]

Apart from the fact that Vermeule focused not on the classical period (or at least the period that would have included a fifth-century Attic tombstone) but on prehistoric and archaic material, her uncertainty as to what the Greeks thought about death reflects an uncertainty that many of them may have felt themselves.[70] John Boardman celebrated this congruence, though he put it down to a Greek illogicality about death.[71] I would emphasise, in addition, that in a world where direct experience of death is impossible, culture is instrumental in generating encounters with it. And one would expect those encounters with death to be as diverse as the cultural interactions from which they emerge.

[69] Richardson (1981).
[70] In fact, Richardson acknowledges this from the outset: 'In the end there is not really much to say: death is the same for all, and what lies beyond remains a matter for faith or conjecture.'
[71] Boardman (1980), reviewing Vermeule's book. Vermeule (1981: 1-2) herself observes that this illogicality is 'a sense of self-mockery' in the face of the unknowable.

CHAPTER ONE

DEATH COMES AS THE END:

ENCOUNTERING DEATH IN PLATO'S *PHAEDO*

ΕΧ. *Αὐτός*, ὦ Φαίδων, *παρεγένου Σωκράτει* ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ᾗ τὸ φάρμακον ἔπιεν ἐν τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ, *ἢ ἄλλου του ἤκουσας*;

ΦΑΙΔ. Αὐτός, ὦ Ἐχέκρατες.

ΕΧ. Τί οὖν δή ἐστιν ἅττα εἶπεν ὁ ἀνὴρ πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου; *καὶ πῶς ἐτελεύτα*; ἡδέως γὰρ ἂν ἐγὼ ἀκούσαιμι.

Echecrates: *Were you yourself there at Socrates' side*, Phaedo, on the actual day he drank the poison in the prison, or *did you hear about it from someone else*?

Phaedo: I was there myself, Echecrates.

E: So then, what kind of things did the man say before his death? *And how did he meet his end*? I'd really like to hear about it.

Plato, *Phaedo* 57a1-6[1]

At the heart of Plato's *Phaedo* is an effort to encounter death.[2] This effort is twofold. A dramatic effort to provide an encounter with the death of Socrates runs alongside a philosophical effort to define encounters with death in general.[3] The driving

[1] Throughout, page and paragraph references are to Stephanus text pages. The translation of this extract is mostly from the 2017 Loeb edition, though I have made some alterations (for example, I read 'before his death' rather than 'before he died'; there is a difference between 'dying' and 'death'). The italics indicate my emphasis.

[2] I treat the *Phaedo* as an 'independent literary artefact' following Rutherford (1995: 3) and his arguments throughout that chapter. In support, see Gill (2002: 153-61, 163-64); Long (2007: 224, 240-41); McCabe (2008: 88). See Morgan (2002: 183-84) for a flexible approach. Plato's art: Bacon (1990), (2001). The philosophical fiction: McCabe (2008: 96-98). The absolute or relative date of the *Phaedo* within a period of about forty years (following the historical Socrates' death in 399 BCE) makes limited difference. Whereas the chronology of Plato's activity is of paramount interest to those interested in the development of Plato's thinking, the principal time reference within the constructed context of the *Phaedo* is *the past*, a past from which the author purports to absent himself. Discussion of the *Phaedo*'s absolute and relative dates: Irwin (2008: 75-84). See further Brandwood (1992) on stylometry; Kraut (1992: 6-7) on reasons for thinking it followed the *Meno*, which may be dated between 386 and 382 BCE. On orderings and their hermeneutic assumptions and consequences: Poster (1998).

[3] The Socrates that matters here is the written Socrates of the *Phaedo*. See especially Rutherford (1995: esp. 62); Michelini (2003). *pace* Burnet (1911: ix-lvi); Hackforth (1955: 13). The 'fall' of the Socratic Problem: Dorion (2010). As a written response to and representation of death, what

question is: what happened/happens at the end (and, more urgently, was/is it an end at all?)?

In this first chapter, I explore how Plato uses his literary medium to stage the challenge of responding to this question. As set out in my epigraph, this is a challenge that he raises in the opening lines of his dialogue with a question that he puts into the mouth of Echecrates: 'How did [Socrates] meet his end?' (πῶς ἐτελεύτα;) With this deceptively simple enquiry, Plato establishes 'the death of Socrates' as his dramatic subject and sets it squarely within an ekphrastic discourse.[4] How close can an outsider get to the moment of Socrates' death?[5] Echecrates was not there on the day that Socrates died. Phaedo was. What Echecrates wants is a clear account (σαφές τι, 57b1) of Socrates' death, a description in as much detail as Phaedo can achieve. As a result, Echecrates' desire for a missed experience, presence at Socrates' side on the very day he drank the hemlock, motivates the dialogue; an encounter with death is a goal from the start.

Plato wrote is more relevant here than what actually happened and the extent to which historical Socrates (and/or his thoughts) overlaps with his literary counterpart is not at issue (see Rowe (2006: 169) for a similar conclusion, though from a philosophical perspective and observing the probable coincidence of literary and real Socrates). See further Blondell (2002: 8-11) and McCabe (2008: 91-92) on Socrateses. Indeed, Socrates' portrait has a certain authenticity to it insofar as it recreates what it might have been like to encounter a man who was 'unlike' other Athenians (and, indeed, unlike non-Athenians such as Simmias and Cebes). The 'artful construction' of Socrates' image as a satyr: Catoni and Giuliani (2019). The Socratic/Platonic division: Arist. *Soph. el.* 183b7-8 and *Metaph.* I.6 987b1-10; Penner (1992: esp. 122-25). Rejecting a distinct 'Socratic' period: Rowe (2007: 4-6, 39-49); Kahn (2009: 39-40, 71-100).

[4] The importance of the Platonic prologue: Gonzalez (2003). This is not to claim that what Plato is doing here is solely, or even mostly, about Socrates' death. It cannot be ignored, for example, that the *Phaedo* contains what is generally considered to be Plato's first articulation of his so-called theory of forms. Nevertheless, 'being there' at Socrates' death is a motivating thread.

[5] Wilson (2007: 107): 'The Phaedo suggests, then, that the living may not ever get complete access to the world of the dead.' Contrast the discussion in Holquist (1990: 37) of Bakhtin's view that this outside narrative of death is all that there is: see, for example, Bakhtin (1990: 104-5).

But death is also one of the central concerns of the *Phaedo*'s philosophical discussions, which seek to demonstrate the soul's immortality. In this respect, the equivocal framing of Echecrates' question is a red flag: πῶς ἐτελεύτα; How did he (the man, Socrates) come to an end, finish (it) off, bring (it) to pass, accomplish (it, death, life)?[6] From the beginning, Echecrates talks of endings. And indeed, engraved upon the cultural inheritance of posterity, Plato's accomplishment, 'the death of Socrates', testifies to his successful treatment of the philosopher's end.[7] But an essential purpose of the dialogue's philosophical discussion is to think of death in terms not of 'endings' but of continuities. Thus, the thought and the artistry of the *Phaedo* (if we can speak of these as separate) appear to be in tension…[8] Though for most of this chapter I will focus on the literary challenges of encountering death in the *Phaedo*, these are densely and enigmatically intertwined with its more overtly philosophical arguments. My view, to which I will return at the end of this chapter, is that the apparent conflict between literary and philosophical imperatives draws attention to, and is designed to draw attention to, the epistemological problem of death; in both the narrative and arguments of the *Phaedo*, Plato works through the imaginative possibilities and impossibilities of responding to Echecrates.[9] For now, I simply note that the ekphrastic set-up is not

[6] Contrast Beets (1997: 108-13, 159-60) on τελευτή as 'a non-temporal transition to the beyond', exceptionally attained by Socrates in life (but by most people in a coincidence of τελευτή with θάνατος). In fact, 'how' is also a red flag. The dialogue is interested in cause: *why* we die (for example) as opposed to *how*. See 95e8-99d2; Irwin (1992: 51-58).

[7] The impact of Socrates' death, as mediated by Plato and others, on Western culture: Wilson (2007). See further Lapatin (2006: 140-45).

[8] Interrelationship of Plato's form and content: Seeskin (1987: 1-22); Ausland (1997: esp. 397-408); Blondell (2002); Scott (2006: esp. 5-6, 214-16); McCabe (2008: esp. 89). The choice of characters in Plato's drama as philosophically symbolic (with focus on the *Phaedo*): Sedley (1995).

[9] The extent to which Plato's dialogues, including the *Phaedo*, are themselves open-ended is a matter of debate (and may vary between dialogues). My view is that the dialogues articulate, model, and are designed to generate, thinking, and so can be read in accordance with a more object-oriented metaphysics: for Plato, ideas (including 'death') *do* exist, and so the quest to define them is worthwhile. He makes no explicit claims to have succeeded in finding answers, only to be engaged in that vital process. See further notes 10, 33, 40, 82.

purely an artistic choice; it is a highly provocative one in the context of the dialogue.[10]

In my study below, I track how Plato deals with the literary challenges of encountering the death of Socrates. I begin with two outside perspectives on death. Looking first at the external backward-facing viewpoints of reporter and writer, listeners and readers, I consider how Plato employs his mediated literary medium to meditate upon the difficulty of encountering someone else's death. How close does Plato take us? What might distance in the text reveal about the epistemological

[10] Some words on dialogue: Plato writes 'dialogues' and his dialogues contain conversation in different guises (direct and reported); we can talk of the handling and impact of the latter as something distinct from the former. It is difficult to speak of dialogue in Plato without the 'interference' of philosophical and literary baggage (Greenwood (2008: 15-18)) and hard to make sense of what genre means for his corpus without the circularity of explaining what he does by reference to the tradition he inspired. Plato's writings as *sui generis*: Arieti (1991: 2); Blondell (2002: 37). There is an undeniable coherence of form across his corpus: all but the *Apology* and the *Letters* can be, and have been, labelled 'dialogues' (though both these exceptions can be considered dialogic since the former anticipates an audience at his trial, including Plato himself, and the latter a recipient and the possibility of two-way correspondence). A high-level summary of characteristics of the dialogues and questions that they raise: Szlezák (1999: 14-18, 78-81). It is also essential to recognise, as others have, variation across Plato's writing. The merits of considering each dialogue on a case by case basis: note 2. This approach, though not universal, is well accepted. We can identify many meaningful and compelling reasons why it made philosophical and literary sense for Plato to write in the form he did. Plausible philosophical explanations abound: it most closely replicates Socratic speech; it stages philosophical debate; it avoids the dogmatism of the authorial voice. Summarising modern approaches to Plato's form from a philosophical perspective: Gill (2002: 145-49). Some earlier views: Gaiser (1959: esp. 9-32, 150-55, 192-94); Gundert (1971: 1-12, 51-63); Meyer (1980); Frede (1992b); Sayre (2001: xii-xviii, 1-32). A literary approach: Stokes (1986). Note further the comments in Plato's work, including Socrates' behaviour and words on misology (*Phd.* 89d1-91c6). In many explanations an anxiety is imputed to Plato whose written medium becomes an inferior representation of the spoken, lived referent. This throws us into the murky fray of Plato's views on *mimesis*: see note 30. Plato's writing as protreptic towards his unwritten philosophy (the approach, more generally, of the Tübingen School): Gaiser (1984: 41-54); Szlezák (1999: 87-89). Compare Greenwood (2004) on written versus spoken words in classical Athens (with focus on Thucydides). Much has also been written on the literary tradition to which Plato responds (including drama, epic, mime, autobiography and biography, sophistic and philosophical treatises). Summarising literary origins of Plato's dialogue form (and how to respond): Rutherford (1995: 10-15). See further Kuhn (1941); Tarrant (1955a); Blondell (2002: 14-37). For ancient discussion of Plato's dialogue form see Diog. Laert. 3.18, 24, 47-51; P. Oxy. 3219. On Plato's use of intertextuality to define the boundaries of his philosophy (not only in parody but also to probe their positive potentialities): Nightingale (1995: esp. 1-12). See further Bakhtin (1981: 21-26, 130-31) on the Platonic dialogues as an example of ancient literature termed *spoudogeloion* and precursor to the novel, and as an early form of autobiography. Ancient dialogue more broadly: Görgemanns (2004: esp. 352-3); Goldhill (2008b); Föllinger and Müller (2013); Dubel and Gotteland (2015).

value of seeing someone die with one's own eyes? Next, I turn to the internal viewpoints of those that attended Socrates' final moments. I show how Plato harnesses the temporality of narrative to reflect upon death as a significant but asymptotic moment, a climax to dying that is anticipated by the forward-facing perspectives of the living. The question lurking behind Echecrates' 'how did Socrates meet his end?' is 'does Plato tell us?', or rather, 'can Plato tell us?' Do we ever see Socrates die?[11] On this note, in the final part of this chapter, I explore one passage where Plato takes an imaginative vault into the mind of the dying Socrates as he, in turn, struggles to grasp the unfathomable abyss of death.

PLATO'S SPYGLASS

I begin with Plato's mediated literary account. Two threads run through this part of the chapter: distance (temporal, spatial, experiential, existential) and perspective. Both are characteristic of ekphrasis; they are embedded in the fabric of a verbal medium that looks back, elsewhere, through, for and at another person.[12] In a Platonic dialogue, multiple conversations always combine in different measures at

[11] By 'we' (or 'our' etc.) I include all intended and unanticipated recipients of Plato's text, contemporary, original and in between. The original context in which Plato's writings were received is unknown. It is not impossible that they were performed, in which case we should think of an implicit dialogue along the lines of author/listener as for Greek drama. Nevertheless, while it is important to recognise the possibility that Plato's words were heard as well as read, it is known that they were eventually widely read. I therefore think of the reception of Plato's work as comprised of readers, but acknowledge the possibility of listeners. Compare Charalabopoulos (2012), who favours reading Plato's dialogues as performance texts. Against this and emphasising Plato's different aims: Kraut (1992: 25-30). Vatri (2017: 71) acknowledges the controversy surrounding the reception of Plato's dialogues and accepts the possibility that different dialogues were produced for different audiences. In chapter five he treats the *Apology* and *Menexenus* as scriptures (not intended for oral delivery).

[12] In the language of later theorists, Plato is manipulating the written form to articulate, grapple with and overcome the ekphrastic challenge of bringing a death of Socrates before our eyes or to recreate for us what it would be like to have been there. Plato and ekphrasis (focusing especially on his presentation of his work as poetry): Bacon (2001). For scholarship more generally on ekphrasis and the visual/verbal relationship, see note 62 on page 34.

different times; this constructs not only a web of viewpoints and voices, but also a network of intermediaries and so a problem of power, reliability and recession. In the *Phaedo*, Plato intensifies the ekphrastic characteristics of his writing as part of an existential meditation: literary distancing and perspectives map cognitive distance and exteriority. This unravels the imaginative nature of responding to death, and makes it an object of contemplation.

Seeing Socrates' death is a problem from the outset. It is immediately clear that this is not another dialogue like the *Euthyphro* or *Crito* (or, indeed, the *Apology*): the man is already dead. This fact motivates the action and subject matter of the dialogue, death, and throws its ekphrastic ambitions, an ever-present but often unacknowledged dynamic in the dialogues, centre-stage. When Echecrates asks 'how did he meet his end?' (πῶς ἐτελεύτα) he issues a challenge: how to satisfy his longing for a missed experience, presence at a death that is temporally and spatially absent.[13]

This challenge permeates the structure of the *Phaedo*, which offers a striking (though not unique) example of the play-within-a-play set-up.[14] The dialogue has a

[13] Over the first few lines of the dialogue (57a), several facts of distance are established: the dialogue is set in Phlius not Athens, takes place after the events narrated within it and occurs between two speaking parties: one, Phaedo, was there in person at Socrates' death in Athens; the other, Echecrates, was not. Echecrates emphasises this distance in the distinction he draws between the time and place of the death and his own situation 'nowadays' in Phlius, a place that, he explains, has limited contact with Athens (57a6-b2). Indeed, if this dialogue was set in the late 380s (see note 2), Phlius might have been considered particularly remote owing to its close, if complicated, relations with Sparta following the invasion of Iphicrates (Xen. *Hell*. 4.4.15).

[14] Other works that embed narrated conversation within a dramatic frame are the *Symposium*, *Euthydemus, Parmenides*, *Protagoras,* and *Theaetetus*. Layers of representative remove are particularly complex in the *Parmenides*. An interesting variant of this structure is *Cleitophon*, which embeds an inner recollected conversation between Cleitophon and Socrates, the same characters that feature in the dramatic frame (although Plato's authorship is doubted). Compare *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, *Laches*, *Meno*, *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, *Cratylus, Greater* and *Lesser Hippias, Alcibiades I* and *II, Hipparchus, Theages, Minos, Epinomis, Politicus, Philebus, Ion, Timaeus, Critias, Sophist* and the *Laws* where the dramatic frame stages the philosophical conversation proper: there is no *mise en*

double setting. The external frame is set in Phlius: Echecrates (a Phliasian) talks with Phaedo, who was present at Socrates' death. Echecrates wants to know about Socrates' last day in the prison: what was discussed and how he died. The main body of the work is Phaedo's account of that last day, concluding (at the end of the dialogue) with Socrates drinking the hemlock and dying. The description of Socrates' final moments and what was said is thus narrated by Phaedo in the context of a conversation with Echecrates.[15] Both parts of the play-within-a-play structure, though discernible, are interwoven because the one re-presents and reflects upon the other. The exterior 'dramatic' dialogue or 'play-script' form operates as a filter on the action within, and strains the death and inner dialogue through the film of Phaedo's narrating memory,[16] of seeing, listening and responding.

Let us begin with the dramatic passage towards the end of the dialogue in which Phaedo describes Socrates' final moments and the revelation of his corpse (118a5-14):

> Ἤδη οὖν σχεδόν τι αὐτοῦ ἦν τὰ περὶ τὸ ἦτρον ψυχόμενα, καὶ ἐκκαλυψάμενος—ἐνεκεκάλυπτο γάρ—εἶπεν—ὃ δὴ τελευταῖον ἐφθέγξατο—Ὦ Κρίτων, ἔφη, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρυόνα· ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε.

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abyme. The dialogue forms differ from one another: the *Crito*, for example, embeds a monologue in which Socrates ventriloquises the Laws of Athens; in the *Menexenus*, dialogue embeds a speech reported by Socrates and allegedly composed by Aspasia. Another type is the narrative frame that embeds a reported conversation, as in the *Republic*, *Lovers*, *Lysis* and *Charmides*, each narrated by Socrates. Note further the speech format of the *Apology*, which embeds (actual or rhetorical) verbal interchange with Meletus. See further Diogenes Laertius 3.49-51 on classifying the dialogues. On the presentation of dialogue in Plato's work ('dialogue en récit et dialogue juxtaposé'), including in manuscript and papyrus editions and by the author: Andrieu (1954 : 284-86, 288-89, 304-8).

[15] On the frame in Plato see McCabe (2008). See further Bacon (1990: 148-49) on the 'simultaneous nearness and distance' arising from the *Phaedo*'s framing scenes; McCabe (1996) on the 'Chinese Whispers effect' in the *Parmenides* (she also notes its presence in the *Symposium* and *Phaedo*) and interaction between literary frame and argument; Clay (2000: 23-31) on Plato's portrait frames; Wilson (2007: 104) on 'eavesdropping' in the *Phaedo*, '[Socrates'] words come to us from beyond the grave'. On frames more generally (in Graeco-Roman art): Platt and Squire (2017).

[16] For notably explicit retrospective commentary on the events he describes: 88c1-7. For a different effect: the *Protagoras*, where coexistence of direct conversation with representation fits within a debate on how to do philosophy, as at 348a3-6 where Socrates encourages Protagoras to put aside the poets and converse directly.

> Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα, ἔφη, ἔσται, ὁ Κρίτων· ἀλλ’ ὅρα εἴ τι ἄλλο λέγεις.
> Ταῦτα ἐρομένου αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔτι ἀπεκρίνατο, ἀλλ’ ὀλίγον χρόνον διαλιπὼν ἐκινήθη τε καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐξεκάλυψεν αὐτόν, καὶ ὃς τὰ ὄμματα ἔστησεν· ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Κρίτων συνέλαβε τὸ στόμα καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς.
>
> Already, then, I reckon, the parts around [Socrates’] abdomen were getting cold, and, uncovering himself (for he had been covered up), he said—indeed, this was the last thing he said—‘Crito,’ he said, ‘we owe a cock to Asclepius; see, then, that you pay what is due and don’t forget’.
> ‘That will all happen, yes,’ said Crito, ‘but see if you have anything else to say…’
> [Socrates] did not make any further response to [Crito’s] question, but, after a short interval, there was motion, and the man uncovered him, and his eyes were in a fixed stare. On seeing this, Crito closed his mouth and eyes.

Several details make this scene immersive for both the internal and external audience. Consider the sensory details: the falling temperature of Socrates’ dying body; the (mediated) sound of his final words, quoted in direct speech; the visual impression of his body’s motion; the repeated veilings and unveilings of his body, alive one moment, dead the next; the fixed stare. These are combined with the viewpoints of characters at the scene: Phaedo and Crito respond to Socrates’ body; they notice its coldness and the vacant gaze of his eyes, and form judgments, or take actions, accordingly. The scene is powerfully, successfully brought to life for listeners and readers: it is, in the words of later theorists, characterised by *enargeia*.

But the frame and punctuating discourse between Phaedo and Echecrates recalls Phaedo’s mediating voice. Though real and narration worlds need not be absent for immersion (as argued by Rutger J. Allan in his categorisation of linguistic and narratological immersive features), Plato does not leave them ‘mentally

backgrounded', undermining textual 'transparency'.[17] The features that contribute to immersion here could have been conveyed in direct speech as Plato does in the *Phaedrus*,[18] even within the play-within-a-play structure. Imagine something along the lines of 'his limbs are cold; he has fallen silent; he has moved; let us uncover him…' Instead, even as Plato brings the scene to life with details and internal perspectives, he reminds his readers of spatial and temporal distance with Phaedo's past-tense third-person narrative (the most obvious example of this is the recurrence of 'he said' throughout the narration).[19] The presence within Socrates' death scene of Phaedo's subjective self, as substantiated by what he sees, feels, says and hears, reiterates response to death as lived experience from the outside. This does not necessarily compromise the *enargeia* of the scene, but it does define the offered experience as one of observing *someone else* die.[20] For the living alone, it is possible to anticipate, observe and contemplate life's story in its entirety. One point that emerges from Plato's presentation is that to encounter death is to live and to outlive; responding to Socrates' death entails retrospective narration of that experience.

[17] For categorisation of linguistic and narratological immersive features: Allan (2020: 18-19). Many are present in Phaedo's narrative, not just here but elsewhere (verisimilitude, perspective, interest and emotional involvement and minimal departure).

[18] On Plato's description of background in the *Phaedrus* through characters' responses to it, see Ferrari (1987: 2-4). Note further Eucleides' comments on representational style at *Tht.* 143b5-c6.

[19] Phaedo's narrating voice repeatedly colours his quotation of others' direct speech: consider instances in this passage of ἔφη (as in 118a7 and 9), εἶπεν (118a6) and ἐφθέγξατο (118a7). These are representative of how his account works more broadly. Insertions in Platonic dialogues that effect proximity or distance: Andrieu (1954: 316-19). On tensions of immersion and reflection and shifting modes of attention: Grethlein (2017: esp. 18-24); chapters by Rutger Allan and Felix Budelmann and Evert Van Emde Boas in Grethlein, Huitink and Tagliabue (2020). For more on narrative temporality see part two of this chapter.

[20] This is characteristic of ekphrasis more broadly; ekphrasis offers a way of seeing, a perspective, an experience of the thing described. This makes ekphrasis appropriate for existential discourse.

This is particularly striking in the opening lines of the quoted extract. The line about owing a cock to Asclepius is infamously cryptic. But just before Socrates says this line (in direct speech), Phaedo comments 'he said—and this was the last thing he said' (εἶπεν—ὃ δὴ τελευταῖον ἐφθέγξατο). He then observes, '"That will all happen, yes," said Crito, "but see if you have anything else to say"' (ἀλλὰ ταῦτα, ἔφη, ἔσται, ὁ Κρίτων· ἀλλ' ὅρα εἴ τι ἄλλο λέγεις). The amalgamation of temporalities here might lead us to wonder whether Socrates' words are deliberately meaningless, awkwardly *insignificant*, at least until retrospectively understood to be what they already are: his last ones.[21] The mismatch between Phaedo's retrospective knowledge and Crito's prospective ignorance, presents an anachronistic representation of present time filtered by Phaedo's future perspective.[22] This, in turn, picks up a sense in which death, an interruption of life from the perspective of the dying, can become a conclusion when reframed by the retrospective narratives of the living. How did Socrates 'make an ending of it'? One answer is: in Plato's *Phaedo*, which shapes an exemplary, and complete, story out of remembering the end of a philosopher's life.[23]

But the problem of distance is not just one of time and space; it is also one of truth. What Echecrates asks first is not what Phaedo saw, but whether he was there (57a,

[21] Socrates' 'final words' are hotly debated: see especially Most (1993). Perhaps Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff acknowledged a similar point to mine when he argued that Plato included these words because they were characteristic and that what was special about them was beside the point ('das Spezielle daran ist ganz ohne Belang'): Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1920: 178).
[22] On Freud's masterplot, Sartre's end-determination and 'anticipation of retrospection' in life and narrative: Brooks (1984: 23, ch. 4). On authorial perspective and the achievement of the temporal closure of death by the other (the author or reader, for example; the significant moment cannot be perceived by the one that dies): Möllendorff (2013: 409).
[23] The overlap between narrative and memory was made explicit early in the dialogue in the conversation between Echecrates and Phaedo (58d2-d9) where three different verbs for representation, description, or narrative (ἀπαγγεῖλαι, διηγήσασθαι, διεξελθεῖν) were equated with the act of remembering (μεμνῆσθαι).

cited in the epigraph to this chapter). The first word, αὐτός, asserts the purported significance of having been there in person at Socrates's side (παρεγένου Σωκράτει). This is reinforced by Echecrates' continued insistence on knowing which people were at 'the death itself' (περὶ αὐτὸν τὸν θάνατον, 58c6); physical presence at the end is important. Phaedo's presence at Socrates' end cuts several ways: it is emotionally meaningful (it confirms that Socrates did not die 'bereft of his friends', ἔρημος […] φίλων);[24] it operates as a benchmark against which Echecrates' desired vicarious experience may be measured; and it poses the hypothesis that there is epistemological value in the eye-witness account. Echecrates asks Phaedo how Socrates died because he is a worthy recounter: his claim to autopsy is as good as it gets.[25] But the question also unfurls the ekphrastic challenge, reporting 'something clear' (σαφές τι, 57b1),[26] and exposes its weakest link, the intermediary. For Echecrates, this not just a matter of rhetorical skill, but of authority and reliability.[27]

The adjective σαφές occurs again in the context of hearsay. At 61c8-62a2, Plato presents characters conversing about talking and listening; dialogue is the subject of dialogue.[28] Plato represents Phaedo reporting Socrates and Cebes reporting what they have heard others (Philolaus and other unknown persons) saying about suicide,

[24] Echecrates seeks this reassurance at 58c9.
[25] The link is revealed by οὖν at 57a5. Autopsy as a 'device for lending verisimilitude to fictional narrative': Stokes (1997: 5). On the limitations of autopsy, see note 32.
[26] Consider: Ps.-Hermog. *Prog.* 10 on ekphrasis in Rabe (1913: 22-23), reproduced and translated in Webb (2009: 200-1): ἀρεταὶ δὲ ἐκφράσεως μάλιστα μὲν σαφήνεια καὶ ἐνάργεια. See further Elsner (2002: 1); notes 12 and 30. Echecrates declares that, apart from the fact that Socrates died by drinking the potion, no one could tell him anything σαφές (57b1); he later reiterates that Phaedo should describe everything as clearly (σαφέστατα, 58d2) and in as much detail (ἀκριβέστατα, 58d8-9) as possible. Phaedo says he will try (πειράσομαι ὑμῖν διηγήσασθαι, 58d4-5).
[27] See note 26. On Plato's position within a discourse on the pleasure and utility that comes from a thorough and detailed narrative, see Erler (2013).
[28] See notes 10 and 131.

which, we are to understand from Socrates' claim at 61d10-e4, is in some way reporting what they think about death or, rather, 'the life beyond' (τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ).[29] Different opinions are expressed as to how likely we are to derive anything clear or definite, σαφές (61d8; 61e8), from what other people say.[30] Cebes is pessimistic: he has 'never heard anyone say anything definite about it'. Socrates is optimistic: 'you may hear something'. As an extended discussion on reported speech and the possibility or impossibility of hearing something 'clear' (σαφές), this passage looks back towards the motivating circumstances for the work as a whole: Echecrates' desire for a clear (σαφές) account of Socrates' death and his last words. Indeed, Socrates' switch from what he has heard (ἐξ ἀκοῆς) to the suggestion that he should examine and tell stories (διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν) about the life beyond (περὶ τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ) unravels the imaginative nature of encountering death, 'what sort of thing we think it is' (ποίαν τινὰ αὐτὴν οἰόμεθα

[29] On Philolaus (c. 470-385 BCE), a Pythagorean philosopher, and the surviving fragments of his work, see Diels and Kranz (1952: vol. 1, 398-419) (DK 44); Huffman (1999: 78-85); Laks and Most (2016: 145-85). For discussion of Philolaus' views on suicide, see Huffman (1993: 327, 330, 405, 408-9).

[30] Compare *Symp.* 172a-173b (and throughout) on the challenge of hearing a clear account years after an event at which the source was not present. See further note 26. It is interesting that in this passage we find some reassurance from Socrates as to the possibility of hearing a true account, though the comment may be facetious. Problems of hearsay open onto a Platonic dialectic on truth, language, representation and the senses. Note especially *Resp.* 10.595a1-608b3; *Soph.* 232b1-241b8; *Phdr.* 274b6-278b6; the enigmatic *Seventh Letter* 341b7-342a1 which, if authentic, prompts us to question whether we should expect to find truth or understanding in Plato's words, written or oral. *Seventh Letter*: Arieti (1991: 6); Kraut (1992: 21-23); Sayre (2001: esp. xii-xxii, 10-17). The *Phaedrus* on writing: Ferrari (1987). Plato's supposed anxiety vis-à-vis the arts, specifically *mimesis*, has been a major topic of debate; though effort has gone into reconciling apparently contradictory views expressed across the corpus (most perplexing being the status of Plato's own art), it seems likely that respect for the arts as a powerful medium brought with it both admiration and caution. For an overview of *mimesis*, see Woodruff (2015: esp. 331-35). On the 'world-reflecting' and 'world-creating' facets of *mimesis* and its probing treatment by Plato, see Halliwell (2002: 22-24, pt. 1). See further Nightingale (2002a); Farness (2003), especially pp. 117-21 on two versions of *mimesis* in Plato's dialogues, abstract correspondence and embodied performance. On what *mimesis* meant before and in Plato, and Plato's attitude to and metaphorical use of the arts (specifically painting): Keuls (1978). Rehabilitation of Plato's written work: Laborderie (1978: 105-14). Plato, poetry and creativity: Asmis (1992); the influence of the poets on Plato (and the *Phaedo* as the 'philosopher's song'): Crotty (2009); Plato's references to his writing as a form of *mousike*: Capra (2015). The problematic power of images in Plato: Destrée and Edmonds (2017b), especially the chapter by Francisco Gonzalez. For the argument that Plato was attacking popular entertainment: Nehamas (2000: 279-99).

εἶναι). As a *mise en abyme* for Phaedo's own account, this excursus on the perils of vicarious experience calls attention to a fault-line running through the dialogue's whole mediated account: it exposes the narrating Phaedo as a possibly unreliable go-between.[31] Phaedo's account of Socrates' death and existential arguments thus sits in counterpart to the myth of Er: death's distance is in both cases overcome, but the value of each privileged narrator's claim to authority must be taken on trust.[32]

Moreover, the streaming of Socrates' death and its accompanying dialogue through the voice of a distant participant in an external conversation parades the underlying exchange between readers and author,[33] another intermediary voice that subsumes and filters the others. An old debate concerns Socrates' (or any other character's) role as a mouthpiece for Plato,[34] but as important in the *Phaedo* is Plato's, and Phaedo's, positions as mouthpieces for the voices they ventriloquise. The dialogue

[31] On this point, note Brooks (1984: 215) on 'memory and narration of failed meanings' and Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale* as a 'book about nothing'. Perhaps Plato's combination of a retrospective account with the challenge of hearing something clear highlights the nothingness of death. See further page 71 and note 110.

[32] See pages 5-7 above (including note 5). The myth of Er as a traditional *theoria* and model for philosophical *theoria*: Nightingale (2004: 76-77). See further Nightingale (2016: 57-62) on sight and Plato. But if sensory vision is treacherous (see p. 58 of Nightingale), what is the value of autopsy (see note 25 above)? The rational vision of death sought in the philosophical journey of the *Phaedo* may have a better claim to authority.

[33] It is this dialogue that is at stake: Gundert (1971: 6). The reader's conversation with Plato (and Plato's encouragement to readers to reflect not just on the weaknesses of the arguments in the dialogues but on the beliefs held by the characters and ourselves): McKim (1988). See Brooks (1984: ch. 6, esp. 236) on framed narratives and listeners as makers of meaning; Clay (1988) on the open dialogue's invitation to readers to think for themselves (focusing on the *Republic*); Sayre (2001: 27-32) on 'active reading' of Plato; Lamm (2006: 107) on Schleiermacher and the 'interpreter as artist'. In fact, perhaps Echecrates' plural reference at 58d7-9 to 'similar such others' who are ready to hear a detailed account of Socrates' final hours accommodates external readers as well as internal listeners. There is dramatic explanation for the plural if we envisage the *Phaedo* as taking place among a group of people in a private house, as in the *Protagoras*. However, the absence of any mention of these other listeners in the context of an otherwise richly dramatised dialogue suggests that at the very least a double meaning is intended. See notes 11 and 131.

[34] See especially contributions in Press (2000). Also: Irwin (1992: 77-78); Kraut (1992: 2-4); Michelini (2003: 58-65); McCabe (2008: 94-96). *pace* Rowe (2007: 15-20), 'Plato *is* Socrates, except, unavoidably, to the extent that Plato as author is also Socrates' creator and manipulator' (p. 19). An extreme approach (Plato's dialogues are dramas; philosophical argument is subordinated to that purpose): Arieti (1991: esp. 1-11). See further note 40.

is full of appropriated, imagined and imaginary speech and much is galvanised by the pressing context of Socrates' imminent death.[35]

There is an amusing example of this at the end of the hearsay discussion. Phaedo reports that 'Cebes laughed quietly at what he said, and said in his own dialect: "Zeus be my witness"' (Καὶ ὁ Κέβης ἠρέμα ἐπιγελάσας, Ἴττω Ζεύς, ἔφη, τῇ αὐτοῦ φωνῇ εἰπών, 62a9-10). The narrative detail of Cebes' quiet laughter (ἠρέμα ἐπιγελάσας) brings Phaedo's, and Plato's, audiences closer to experiencing Cebes' direct speech by revealing Cebes' manner and mental process; Phaedo communicates not just Cebes' volume and tone, but his cognitive engagement with Socrates' words and his compassionate moderation of his laughter.[36] The prefix ἐπι- underscores that Cebes' emotional reaction is a response and that his utterance forms part of two-way communication. Then, Plato inserts a joke: 'speaking with his own voice' (τῇ αὐτοῦ φωνῇ εἰπών). Yes, this is another realistic detail: Cebes' native Boeotian dialect.[37] But the allusion to Cebes' 'voice' might remind readers of the concinnity of voices that make this utterance: the laughing voice of the internal character Cebes; the narrating voice of the external character Phaedo; the authorial voice of the writer Plato.[38] In one sentence, Plato recreates what was said and how, filters Cebes' viewpoint through Phaedo's experience, and erases the autonomy of Cebes, Phaedo and the others in a wink from the author's text to its

[35] Among other examples: Socrates is moved to put Aesop into poetry (61b2-7); Cebes urges Socrates to speak to a hypothetical frightened child that dwells within his companions (77e4-8); Socrates discusses telling stories about the beyond (61d10-e4, 110b, 114d1-8).
[36] Representation of intelligent response is reinforced by the connective καί.
[37] As argued in Rowe (1992) on 62a8; Emlyn-Jones and Prendy (2017: 309, n. 19). Verisimilitude as an immersive feature: Allan (2020: 18). In the light of Stephen Colvin's study of marked language in Old Comedy, we should be cautious of interpreting Cebes' Boeotian dialect as indicating, on its own, his 'substandard' philosophy here; Colvin (2000).
[38] Though note Bakhtin (1981: 47) on the 'system of languages' in the novel and the omnipresence of the author, 'with *almost no direct language of his own*'. Bakhtin elsewhere identifies Plato's dialogues as a precursor to the novel: see note 10.

reader.[39] Plato's own mediating voice is, as in all his dialogues, thoroughly present.[40]

In a different but important sense, however, and more than in any other dialogue, Plato is absent from the *Phaedo*. He quite literally writes himself out in Phaedo's overt reference to his name at 59b10:[41] 'But Plato, I think, was ill' (Πλάτων δὲ οἶμαι ἠσθένει). The natural and widely accepted interpretation of this statement is that Phaedo explains Plato's absence from Socrates' death by reference to his illness. The explicit naming of the absent friend reminds us of his tacit authorial presence,[42] but it also calls his authority into question in a manner highly pertinent to the ongoing discourse on direct experience and reliability. If Echecrates, Plato and we were not there, how close can we get to the death? The author's own absence from the represented scene reinforces the distance inherent in the dialogue's structure. Is Plato *another* Er-type character?[43] The unease that this stirs is relevant and provoking. But the point, perhaps, is less the overwhelming problem of distance than the possibility of overcoming it not by privileged narration, but by philosophy, a verbal representation that just might reveal the invisible truth.[44]

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[39] Ekphrasis, Freud and the collusion of speaker and listener in verbal erasure of their object: Elsner (2004: 158-63).

[40] Plato's presence in his dialogue is a major thread (often an assumption) in scholarship on Plato's corpus akin to debates on biography and text: how far can we excavate an author's philosophy from what he writes? See further Möllendorff (2013: esp. 405-9, 416). Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin on the author's (non-)existence: Lodge (1990: 98-99), 'Barthes says: because the author does not coincide with the language of the text, he does not exist. Bakhtin says, it is precisely because he does not so coincide that we must posit his existence.' On the author as a function of literary discourse ('la fonction-auteur'), see Foucault (1969).

[41] The only other reference to Plato by name is at *Ap.* 34a2.

[42] Rowe (1992) on 59b6-c6: 'it also, paradoxically, reminds us of his presence as author—while also denying it (after all, he wasn't even *there*)'. See further Dubel (2015: 16) on a similar play in οὐ δῆτα· ἐν Αἰγίνῃ ἐλέγοντο εἶναι, '« Hé bien non, ils étaient, à ce que l'on disait, à Égine ». Platon s'efface ainsi derrière Phédon, qui à son tour renvoie au bruit qui court.' See note 40.

[43] The dialogues as 'manifest fictions': Crane (1996: 73).

[44] The author's irrelevance in Plato for an argument's truth: Edelstein (1962); Clay (2000: 103-6); Tarrant (2000: 79-80). See further Goldhill (2002: 5, 80-110) on fifth-century invention of prose as a 'contest of authority'.

DEATH FORETOLD

So far, I have explored how Plato contrives a literary foil to his existential meditation by presenting Socrates' death in a verbal medium that looks back, through, for and at another. But the *Phaedo* is as much about looking forwards as it is about looking back. In this part, I move on to consider how Plato provokes reflection upon the exteriority that defines an encounter with someone else's death by aligning readers' literary expectations of a narrative climax with anticipatory internal perspectives on the ending of Socrates' life.

As soon as the *Phaedo* begins, Plato sets his readers' minds on 'the end' or, rather, the process of reaching an ending. Echecrates' question πῶς ἐτελεύτα establishes the *telos* of the *Phaedo* as, in many senses of the word, a clear account of Socrates' death.[45] This writes internal and external readers and listeners into a mood of anticipation, and sets an expectation that 'death' will somehow be not just a climactic moment, but an ending. The narrative longing that results is sharpened by Echecrates' insistent requests for details on the 'actual death',[46] and by Phaedo's failed efforts to quench Echecrates' desire.[47] The concluding echo in Phaedo's ἥδε ἡ τελευτή, 'This then was the end', thus brings the literary narrative in full circle,

[45] *pace* Hackforth (1955: 187) who, as part of a wider approach that privileges Plato's philosophical purpose over his literary one, makes one comment on the last scene of the *Phaedo*: 'This final section needs neither summary nor comment.'

[46] See especially 57a5-b3; 58c6-9; 58d2-3; 58d7-9, among other questions as to who was there and what was said. Psychoanalysis of narrative, especially the 'textual erotics' of reading plot: Brooks (1984: esp. ch. 2). For an approach that finds psychology (Freudian ideas, for example) in Plato: Brès (1968). An 'expectation of closure' in the *Phaedo* (though he goes on to discuss how the myth leaves things open): Clay (2000: 172). See further Halperin (1992) on erotics of narrativity in the *Symposium*.

[47] Consider Echecrates' insistence on the 'actual moment' (as at 58c6, αὐτὸν τὸν θάνατον) rather than descriptions of Socrates drinking the hemlock (57b2) and how the trial went (58a1-3).

and reflects how Plato's literary medium has overdetermined Socrates' death as an ending.[48]

As pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, emphasis on 'endings' seems at odds with the assumptions and arguments of the so-called philosophical parts of the dialogue regarding the immortality of the soul. Does Plato's writing frame Socrates' death in terms of endings in a counter thread to the *Phaedo*'s overt philosophy? Though I will explore this problem more fully in my conclusion, I note here that the anticipation that Plato generates with his narrative simulates for readers the psychological experience of waiting for (anticipating, fearing) another's imminent death.[49] The urgency of Socrates' condemned situation (his 'appointed hour' is νῦν (115a5)) motivates and intensifies not just his companions' fear of death, an inevitable journey that they will make in the future (ἔν τινι χρόνῳ, 115a4), but the philosophical imperative of neutralising that fear. When Plato sets his readers' minds on the 'end', he harnesses the narrative urge of the text to replicate and to reinforce that urgency, and so to impel reflection on, and conquest of, the hobgoblins of death.[50]

[48] Note Socrates' reference to his imminent death as 'the appointed hour' (ἐμὲ δὲ νῦν ἤδη καλεῖ … ἡ εἱμαρμένη) when writing himself into a tragic hero role (φαίη ἂν ἀνὴρ τραγικός), 115a5-6.

[49] Though Socrates' death initiates an existential discussion that affects all those present; all, inevitably, await death. The predicament of Socrates' companions in *Phaedo* the drama: Jansen (2013: 337).

[50] 77e8: τὰ μορμολύκεια. Note Dorter (1982b: 4-9): Socrates defends his fourteen named companions from the fear of death as Theseus protects his twice seven companions from the Minotaur (a running theme). See further Bacon (1990) on Socrates, Theseus and Herakles. In the text, see 89c9-10 for Socrates as Herakles and 95b7-8 for his exhortation to 'approach in Homeric fashion'. Compare *Prt.* 340a1-6 for a call by Socrates for heroic assistance; *Grg.* 473d3 where Socrates accuses Polus of trying to frighten him (μορμολύττῃ) with descriptions of punishment; *Cri.* 46c3-5 on the possibility that the power of the majority might frighten like a hobgoblin (μορμολύττηται). The connection between Socrates' use of charms and philosophical midwifery, an idea explored more widely in Plato's corpus: *Tht.* 157c7-d5.

Let us consider how Plato builds narrative tension in the *Phaedo* by thematising the condition of waiting. The moment of Socrates' departure, the final absence, is prefigured in the persistent absence of the death moment from the text. Again and again, the drama of the *Phaedo* is about waiting for Socrates to die: the naval mission must return from Delos (58a6-c5);[51] the prison must open (59d4-6); the Eleven must unchain Socrates (59e3-60a1); Socrates must finish his bath and bid farewell to his family, which takes 'a long time' (116a2-b6);[52] Crito suggests that Socrates stave off the end still further—'there's still time!' (ἔτι γὰρ ἐγχωρεῖ, 116e6); Socrates responds 'there's no longer anything of it left' (οὐδενὸς ἔτι ἐνόντος, 117a3)—surely we are at the end? Yet, even then, the boy takes 'a long time' to get the man who will administer the hemlock (συχνὸν χρόνον διατρίψας, 117a6). Most importantly, Socrates must stop talking… Crito and the man who will administer the poison wait for some time to warn Socrates that he will delay his death if he talks too much (63d4-e2). Like Scheherazade's tales, the many, lengthy, philosophical arguments that Socrates proposes to defend his companions from the fear of death stave off the climax of his own end.[53] As Socrates says, his life is not long enough to prove the truth of his final tale, but 'nothing prevents me from talking…' (οὐδέν με κωλύει λέγειν, 108e1-2); 'one should sing things like this to oneself as a charm, as it were, which is precisely why I too have been prolonging this story for so long' (καὶ χρὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὥσπερ ἐπᾴδειν ἑαυτῷ, διὸ δὴ ἔγωγε καὶ

[51] The *Crito* is set in this gap between Socrates' trial and execution (about a month).
[52] Socrates' bath is particularly teasing in effect because Plato sets up the expectation that the moment of death has finally arrived: ἐμὲ δὲ νῦν ἤδη καλεῖ, φαίη ἂν ἀνὴρ τραγικός, ἡ εἱμαρμένη, καὶ σχεδόν τί μοι ὥρα *τραπέσθαι πρὸς τὸ λουτρόν·* (115a5-7) (my emphasis). Orphic symbolism to the last bath: Stewart (1972).
[53] Sheherazade's 'life-giving' narration not only delays and so 'sustains', but also 'arouses': Brooks (1984: 61).

πάλαι μηκύνω τὸν μῦθον, 114d6-8). Words, arguments and stories fill the time before sunset; philosophy is as much about practising death as *waiting* for it.[54]

Moreover, if to be heard is to exist,[55] discussion, narrated or otherwise, sustains the life and immortality of the soul that its participants debate. At this point I turn briefly to a passage on mourning the dying argument (89b4-c1):

> … Αὔριον δή, ἔφη, ἴσως, ὦ Φαίδων, τὰς καλὰς ταύτας κόμας ἀποκερῇ.
> Ἔοικεν, ἦν δ'ἐγώ, ὦ Σώκρατες.
> Οὔκ, ἄν γε ἐμοὶ πείθῃ.
> Ἀλλὰ τί; ἦν δ'ἐγώ.
> Τήμερον, ἔφη, κἀγὼ τὰς ἐμὰς καὶ σὺ ταύτας, ἐάνπερ γε ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος τελευτήσῃ καὶ μὴ δυνώμεθα αὐτὸν ἀναβιώσασθαι.
>
> … 'Tomorrow, then, Phaedo' he said, 'perhaps, you'll shear off your beautiful hair.'
> 'It looks like it, Socrates,' I said.
> 'It doesn't; not if you're listening to me.'
> 'But, what do you mean?' I asked.
> 'Today,' he said, 'I'll shear mine and you'll shear yours today if our argument dies and we can't bring it back to life.'

This interchange sets centre-stage a running correspondence between argument's failure and life's end (in counterpart to narrative's climax).[56] When Phaedo agrees that he will cut his beautiful hair on the day after Socrates' death,[57] Socrates

[54] One philosophical topic of the *Phaedo* is the connection between practising philosophy and practising dying and being dead: see especially 64a4-67e7. On philosophy as an exercise in dying as 'das eigentliche Thema des *Phaidon*': Gundert (1971: 51).

[55] See Phillips (2021: 48-54) for discussion of Stewart (2009: 58) on 'poetry's agency in the formation of selfhood' and, further, on the relationship between listening, self-reflection, and 'enactment of selfhood' (pertinent here in Socrates' anticipation of Phaedo's response to his words, which constitutes Socrates' own sense of selfhood, 'not if you're listening to me'). Indeed, throughout her chapter, Susan Stewart explores the interrelationships between philosophy and lyric, for example 'both […] are solo speakers' (p. 45). Compare Bakhtin (1981: 134), 'For the classical Greek, every aspect of existence could be *seen* and *heard*'.

[56] Following Bakhtin, the chronotope of Socrates' life's course gives flesh and blood to the abstraction of philosophy: Bakhtin (1981: 250).

[57] The language with which Phaedo describes how Socrates' stroked his head and played with his hair, and his subsequent words, is laced with the pain of intimacy that will be lost and beauty that will be marred. The combination of an image of mourning with an erotic theme—the imminent sunset of Phaedo's youth and beauty—may hint at Phaedo's own mortality: compare Anac. *PMG* 347 fr. 1, vv. 1-9, in which the poet grieves over the shorn head of Smerdies, envisaging his hair as a soldier, falling in the dust at a stroke of iron (separation from the beloved seen through the prism

impresses philosophy's own fragility. For Socrates, losing his argument is a double death because it concedes the mortality of his soul. In fact, the symbiosis of philosophy and life also emerged in Xanthippe's rejected emotional outcry on seeing her husband's friends enter his cell (60a5-6):

> Ὦ Σώκρατες, ὕστατον δή σε προσεροῦσι νῦν οἱ ἐπιτήδειοι καὶ σὺ τούτους.
>
> Socrates, this is the very last time your friends will be speaking with you, and you with them.

The literary philosophy that unfolds in the dialogue thus anticipates and postpones the end of the philosopher together with its own dialectic and narrative conclusion.

At the end of the dialogue, Socrates finally drinks the hemlock (117c3-5):

> Καὶ ἅμ' εἰπὼν ταῦτα ἐπισχόμενος καὶ μάλα εὐχερῶς καὶ εὐκόλως ἐξέπιεν.
>
> And as soon as he'd said this he put the cup to his lips and, with remarkable indifference and composure, drank it down.

This is immediately followed by a violent outpouring of grief. Phaedo's tears come in an abundant flood (ἀστακτὶ ἐχώρει τὰ δάκρυα, 117c8); Crito is overwhelmed, unable to withstand the onslaught of tears (οὐχ οἷός τ' ἦν κατέχειν τὰ δάκρυα, 117d2-3). In a gesture of surrender, both conceal themselves: Phaedo with his veil (117c8); Crito stands up and apart (117d3). Apollodorus' guttural eruption (ἀναβρυχησάμενος, 117d5) into fresh bouts of distressed weeping borders on inhuman. His companions' lamentation offers the momentary possibility that Socrates has actually died: *this* is the climax for which we have waited.[58] With this

of separation in death): see Bernsdorff (2020: ii.356-72) on the cutting of Smerdies' hair as the beginning of his adulthood and, more generally, on the poetic discourse that surrounds hair cutting.
[58] The noisiness of burials: Rowe (1992) on 117e1-2. Readers' pleasure at the narrative climax might echo the pleasure of Socrates' companions in emotional and sensory indulgence and the pleasure of

sensorily and emotionally intense moment, Plato prefigures the overwhelming impact of death evinced in Socrates' later ekphrasis (discussed in part three). But Socrates still lives, as his blithe and gentle chiding reminds them (117d7-e2):[59]

> Ἐκεῖνος δέ, Οἷα, ἔφη, ποιεῖτε, ὦ θαυμάσιοι. ἐγὼ μέντοι οὐχ ἥκιστα τούτου ἕνεκα τὰς γυναῖκας ἀπέπεμψα, ἵνα μὴ τοιαῦτα πλημμελοῖεν· καὶ γὰρ ἀκήκοα ὅτι ἐν εὐφημίᾳ χρὴ τελευτᾶν. ἀλλ' ἡσυχίαν τε ἄγετε καὶ καρτερεῖτε.
>
> But he said, 'what strange behaviour, you odd lot! And when it was for this reason above all that I sent the women away: so they wouldn't sound offkey like this! For I've also heard that one should die in silence. So quieten down and pull yourselves together.'

The astonishing (in Socrates' eyes) nature of his companions' response—ὦ θαυμάσιοι (117d7)—is a mirrored glimpse of what it might look like to behold the real deal: at the start of his narrative, Phaedo described the experience of being present with Socrates on his final day in the same language, as 'marvellous' (Καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγενόμενος, 58e1-2).[60] In prefiguring what is still to come, the passion of the scene thus heightens, rather than satisfies, readers' and listeners' longing. Death the final stage must be even more astonishing. Emotional response to death is still closely bound up with the tension of waiting.

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philosophy. Compare *Prt.* 335d4-5 on the pleasure of listening to philosophical discussion; *Phlb.* 47d5-50e2 on the mixture of pleasure and pain in mournings, tragedies and comedies, and 39c7-e6 on anticipation; *Resp.* 4.439e5-440a4 for Leontius' disgusted desire to look at the 'fine spectacle' of some corpses. See especially Liebert (2017: 120-70) on tragic pleasure in Plato's *Republic*. See further Frede (1992a) for a philosophical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain in Plato (focusing on the *Philebus* but also reviewing his earlier theories). Emotional impact as an important part of Plato's dialogues and argument: Blank (1993: esp. 436-39). *pace* Nussbaum (2001: 131-33) on the dialogues' 'dry' tone and appeal to our intellect. See further Gallop (2003) on emotional power as a means of catharsis and a persuasive depiction of faith in reason. More generally, see Rapp (2015: 444-45) on emotions and Plato. Weeping for oneself and not the dying Socrates fits with emphasis in this chapter on the viewing or listening subject's perspective.

[59] 117d7-e2. To the extent that readers noticed echoes of Archil. fr. 13 West in this passage, Socrates' words not only affirm the sense in which his death is a 'bloody wound' that merits mourning by his companions but also the sense in which the occasion evokes a curious mixture of pleasure, pain, laughter and tears (see page 70), such as one might experience in the context of sympotic poetry. See further Steiner (2012) on the variegated quality and consolatory function of fr. 13.

[60] See especially Huitink (2020) for an embodied approach to *enargeia* and *phantasia*. A similar bodily and emotional imaginative engagement with Socrates' death may be shown here.

Then Plato unfolds a scene of cool, clinically precise attention to the progress of the hemlock upwards from Socrates' feet towards his heart.[61] The pace slows as the poison takes effect, and a mood of fascinated horror sets in as the narrative creeps towards its inevitable end (117e4-118a3):

> ὁ δὲ περιελθών, ἐπειδή οἱ βαρύνεσθαι ἔφη τὰ σκέλη, κατεκλίνη ὕπτιος—οὕτω γὰρ ἐκέλευεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος—καὶ ἅμα ἐφαπτόμενος αὐτοῦ οὗτος ὁ δοὺς τὸ φάρμακον, διαλιπὼν χρόνον ἐπεσκόπει τοὺς πόδας καὶ τὰ σκέλη, κἄπειτα σφόδρα πιέσας αὐτοῦ τὸν πόδα ἤρετο εἰ αἰσθάνοιτο, ὁ δ'οὐκ ἔφη. καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο αὖθις τὰς κνήμας· καὶ ἐπανιὼν οὕτως ἡμῖν ἐπεδείκνυτο ὅτι ψύχοιτό τε καὶ πήγνυτο.
>
> [Socrates] walked around, and then, when he said his legs were getting heavy, he lay down on his back (because the man told him to do that) and at the same time the man who had given him the hemlock took hold of him and after a while he inspected his feet and legs, and then, squeezing his foot firmly, he asked if he could feel anything. He said he couldn't. And after this, he repeated the process on his shins. And moving upwards like this he showed us that he was getting cold and rigid.

Focus is still on sensory experience, but Plato sets against the appetitive experience of Socrates' companions the enervated impassivity of the moribund Socrates. The thundering inundation of their lamentation is met with a body that freezes stiffer and eventually falls silent (ταῦτα ἐρομένου αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔτι ἀπεκρίνατο, 118a11). In fact, on Phaedo's presentation, the last sensation felt by Socrates is the heaviness of his legs (οἱ βαρύνεσθαι ἔφη τὰ σκέλη, 117e4-5). The rest of the sensory experience of death (the touch of his foot and shins; the coldness and stiffness of his body and the areas about his abdomen) is not felt by him at all. These are all sensations suffered by the anonymous man who brought Socrates the hemlock.

[61] Bloch (2002) demonstrates that this scene is a medically realistic exposition of the symptoms caused by ingestion of poison hemlock. While this does not change my treatment with regard to the historicity of the *Phaedo*, it is important that this is not a self-consciously poetic departure from well-known symptoms of seizure, as suggested in Gill (1973) and previously widely accepted. She also argues that Plato/Phaedo does not describe Socrates' body as cold and stiff, but as 'thick' and 'stuck' (paralysed). Below, I refer to temperature and rigidity, but perhaps we should think instead in terms of immobility and numbness. This would increase the contrast between the sensory perspective of Socrates and the anonymous man.

With an abundance of sensory details and reflections upon them, Phaedo shows us a man that is not only losing his sense of touch, but losing his status as a person. Socrates' body is grasped, squeezed, doubly inspected beneath the professional eyes of the man who gave him the hemlock and the spectating eyes of his companions, even multiply once we include Phaedo's listeners and Plato's readers. Who is the 'us' (ἡμῖν) to whom the man demonstrates what is happening to Socrates' body? Not, it appears, Socrates (who might be most interested in what is happening to his body); Phaedo has usually used 'we' to refer to himself and to Socrates' other companions.[62] The anonymous man's actions seem no longer to be directed towards Socrates, but towards his audience. In this way, over the course of these lines, Socrates becomes, progressively, an object, a physical object of touch and sight, a notional object of discourse. With this divergence of subjectivities (represented in feeling and unfeeling bodies), Plato brings us tantalisingly close to seeing dying itself, the extinguishing of the subjective 'I' in the switch from life to death.[63]

As the hemlock nears Socrates' heart, Phaedo makes the following observation (118a6-7):

> καὶ ἐκκαλυψάμενος—ἐνεκεκάλυπτο γάρ—εἶπεν—ὃ δὴ τελευταῖον ἐφθέγξατο—
>
> and uncovering himself—for he had wrapped himself up—he said—and this was the last thing he said—

When Socrates speaks his final words (see page 44), he lifts a veil.[64] Plato teeters on the brink of showing us, face to face, the moment of Socrates' death. Socrates is

[62] Elsewhere ἡμῖν can refer to readers of historical writings: see e.g. Polyb. 8.8.4.
[63] Dying as change of state (between opposites): 70d2-72d10. Arguing against this and, indeed, against the possibility of speaking of death in terms of 'ceasing to exist': Williams (1969).
[64] This is the first mention of Socrates' veil and is presumably introduced so that it may be removed.

silent; Phaedo uses the ominously passive verb 'he was moved' (ἐκινήθη, 118a12): is *this* the moment of death?[65] But Phaedo continues 'the man uncovered him, and he presented a fixed stare' (ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐξεκάλυψεν αὐτόν, καὶ ὃς τὰ ὄμματα ἔστησεν, 118a12-13).[66] Somehow, in between his final words and his deathly gaze, Socrates was covered once again. The moment itself, the mysterious point of change, is a point of failure, hidden behind Socrates' veil. The mask-like face of the corpse does not belong to Socrates.[67] We missed the death. Though Phaedo has drawn tantalisingly close to showing eclipsed subjectivity,[68] his collapse of the before and after suggests that, even for an eye-witness, the moment of death confounds words.

In the verbal medium of the *Phaedo*, the representation of Socrates' death continues until the end of the argument, the end of the philosopher's life and the closing of 'the' mouth and 'the' eyes that belong naturally to Socrates but are grammatically unspecified so as to belong also to Crito or Phaedo or Plato or his readers (118a13-14):

> ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Κρίτων συνέλαβε τὸ στόμα καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς.
>
> When Crito saw this he closed the mouth and eyes.

When Crito sees Socrates' dead face with his own open eyes, he closes the philosopher's eyes and shuts his mouth.[69] And nothing more is heard from Socrates,

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[65] Gill (1973: 28) suggests this is the departure of Socrates' soul.
[66] Plato's use of the transitive aorist ἔστησεν gives Socrates, as subject of the verb, agency here even in the moment of his fixed stare.
[67] This is a point that Socrates has emphasised in the *Phaedo*, notably at 115c4-116a1.
[68] Though ἔστησεν hints at Socrates' continued, fleeting agency (see note 66), raising the possibility that the veil lifts in the instant that Socrates dies, Plato's language is ambiguous; it also communicates shock—the sudden realisation that Socrates is already dead.
[69] Closing the mouth is a standard part of ancient Greek funerary practice; *prothesis* scenes on pots sometimes show chin straps on the head of the deceased, used to hold the jaw closed: see Kurtz and Boardman (1971). Here it has the additional effect of drawing attention to Socrates' silence and the end of his discussion.

or from Crito either, for the voice of Phaedo turns away to Echecrates to define, to objectify and to silence the great philosopher (118a15-17):[70]

> ἥδε ἡ τελευτή, ὦ Ἐχέκρατες, τοῦ ἑταίρου ἡμῖν ἐγένετο, ἀνδρός, ὡς ἡμεῖς φαῖμεν ἄν, τῶν τότε ὧν ἐπειράθημεν ἀρίστου καὶ ἄλλως φρονιμωτάτου καὶ δικαιοτάτου.
>
> This became the end, Echecrates, of our companion, of a man, who we would say, of the men at that time whom we put to the test, was the best and above all the wisest and most just.

In a Janus-like switch from the waiting game, Plato elides straight into memory. The narrative promise of death as the end in πῶς ἐτελεύτα is met with ἡ τελευτή, but instead of an 'end', Plato writes a memorial to the 'achievement' of Socrates the 'best, wisest and most just',[71] treating him to the Homeric beautiful death in his celebratory response and in his blend of narrated action and dialogue.[72] With a flash of polysemy,[73] Phaedo's retreat from the moment of Socrates' death reveals another climax, Plato's *Death of Socrates*.[74]

Against the fearfully expectant current of Plato's literary philosophy echoes the life of his text: Plato's written account of Phaedo's narrated representation of Socrates' demise. The anticipation of Socrates' end that unites Plato's external and internal audiences sits in mirrored counterpart to the retrospection of author and narrator, who not only remember but also memorialise Socrates with a verbal monument that

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[70] See note 39.
[71] See Nails (2007: 17): with this epithet, Phaedo echoes the unnamed man who brought the hemlock.
[72] On the Homeric beautiful death: Vernant (1991a: esp. 57-58). Socrates as hero: note 50. *pace* Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1920: 179) on Plato's cold restraint here.
[73] See Derrida (2003) on the φάρμακον in Plato's *Phaedrus* and the volatility of writing: a similar game may be present in the *Phaedo*. See note 30.
[74] The death of Socrates as the climax of his life and Plato's role in creating that image for posterity: Wilson (2007). The greater visual appeal of Socrates' death than his philosophical practice: Lapatin (2006: 140-45). See further Burnet (1911: x), 'the likeness of a great philosopher in the supreme crisis of his life'; Arieti (1991: 248-49) on 'preservation of Socrates' memory'; Silverman (2003: 267, 286) on the *Phaedo* as a eulogy; Gallop (2019), 'a philosophical memoir rather than a biographical record'. Note Nehamas (1998) on philosophy as a mode of life: a way of dying crowns a way of living.

stands in permanent attestation of his death even as it offers ongoing communion with him by means of its representational substitute.[75]

In this way, throughout the *Phaedo*, Plato builds a tension between anticipation and recollection, build up and aftermath: these two conflicting temporal drives, both part of a narrative mode, dominate the lived experience of another's death.

SWAN SONG[76]

I now turn to a passage in which Plato imagines an encounter with death from the perspective of the dying Socrates: what might it be like to face something unfathomable? I explore how Plato uses literary texture to communicate ignorance and awe, and how, by spectacular failure, he comments on the imaginative nature of his writing.[77] The passage is 111e6-115a3, Socrates' fantastic ekphrasis of the land of the dead.

[75] Perpetuated communion through the image: note 110 on page 114. See further Estrin (2016); Arrington (2018: n. 3); note 56 on page 32.
[76] See 84e3-85b7. A similar title: Gallop (2003).
[77] Socrates' imaginative account has apparently come from another source; he has been persuaded by 'someone' (τινος, 108c8). This source has either been lost or else Plato has Socrates give this vague reference as part of an ongoing thread in the *Phaedo* on hearsay and the challenge of hearing something σαφές: see note 30. There is a running conceit that Socrates is repeating theories that he has heard from others (ὡς ἐγὼ ὑπό τινος πέπεισμαι, 108c7-8; references to Socrates' having been persuaded at 108d3 and 108e1; Socrates' use of the passive λέγεται to refer to his account at 110b5). This picks up the problem of getting a clear account from a report. Noting the hearsay that underpins Socrates' myths of judgment in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*: Clay (2000: 174). The failure of arguments in the *Phaedo,* mortal ignorance of the afterlife and Socrates' courage: Arieti (1991: 4-5, 215-29).

From the outset, Plato presents Socrates' ekphrasis as imaginative.[78] He explicitly sets Socrates' description (διηγήσασθαι, 108d5; διελήλυθα, 114d2) within a cautionary frame. At the start of his account (the geography of the earth and the experience of souls in the afterlife), Socrates opens with the comment that, while no prophetic skill is needed for description, it is too difficult even with Glaucus' skill to prove its truth (108d4-6).[79] He closes his description with the acknowledgement that it would not be suitable for any man in his right mind to rely on things being as he has described (114d1-2). Socrates suggests that the challenge of telling the truth about death lies not only in the limits of time (ὁ βίος μοι δοκεῖ ὁ ἐμός […] τῷ μήκει τοῦ λόγου οὐκ ἐξαρκεῖν, 108d8-9), but also in the confines of human knowledge (εἰ καὶ ἠπιστάμην, 108d7-8); with this he puts a question mark over mankind's ability to think inside the black box of death.

Having posited (via Socrates) the epistemological impossibility of thinking our way into the mind of someone who will and does actually die, Plato then explores the possibility of surmounting it. Socrates' narrative (μῦθος) thus emerges as a parallel for Plato's.[80] Aside from Plato's other possible motivations for including this

[78] Imaginative in the sense of experiencing something in the absence of its physical presence. For approaches to processes of imagination in classical Athens, see Clifford and Buxton (Forthcoming b).

[79] Critiquing six possible Glaucuses cited in the scholia and Eusebius: Clay (1985). It is plausible that Socrates refers to a seventh (the sea-god Glaucus Pontius) not least because of his prophetic powers. For other reasons, see Clay (1985: 233-36), especially on links to the imagery and philosophy of the *Republic*.

[80] Socrates and Simmias explicitly refer to Socrates' account as a μῦθος at 110b1 and b4, and 114d8. On the status of *muthos* in Plato's philosophy, see note 4 on page 6. See further: Dorter (1982a: 565) on the *Phaedo's* ambiguous status as 'mythology'; Ferrari (1987) on the strengths of *mythos* (in complement to argument) and, in any case, the importance of attending to substance not form; Osborne (1996) on Timaeus' creative discourse in the *Timaeus* as 'a likeness of the ideal'; Morgan (2000: 3) on the interconnected nature of *logos* and *muthos*, *muthos* 'not just as a foil but as a mode of philosophical thought and presentation'; Nightingale (2002b: 235-36) on the dialogic relation of *muthos* to other genres of discourse here (*muthos* as persuasive not authoritative); Edmonds (2004: esp. 159-71, 219-20) on the traditional and authoritative contribution of myth to Socrates' arguments in the *Phaedo*; McCabe (2010: 83-99) on myth's dialectic opposition to argument; Martinez (2013: 37-40) on the value of the 'eikastic' *muthos* (the myth that aims to clarify philosophical truths, not

passage,[81] one lies in the value of myth as an experiential counterpart to other forms of encounter with death in the *Phaedo*: philosophy and description. Consider Socrates' (enigmatic) declaration at 61d9-e4, when he offers an optimistic take on the value of description.[82] When it comes to the time before sunset (ἐν τῷ μέχρι ἡλίου δυσμῶν χρόνῳ), confrontation with an experience of maximum uncertainty and remoteness from what is familiar, 'going away from *home* to *that (unspecified) place*' (ἐκεῖσε ἀποδημεῖν), what can the dying do but 'look in different ways' and 'give an account' (διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν)?[83] Socrates suggests that a diverse approach, looking and talking in different ways about death, is intrinsically appropriate to his situation.

This offers a hint of optimism as to the possibilities of overcoming the conceptual challenge posed by death. As a result, the spectre of ekphrastic failure that overshadows this passage indicates how not to read, or respond, to Socrates' words: what questions not to ask.[84] If we think about ekphrasis as orchestrating a way of seeing and experiencing (as opposed to effecting, as far as possible, replication of its referent),[85] Socrates' ekphrasis operates as a window into the mind of a dying man as he encounters death.[86] As Socrates says at the end of the passage (114d2-6, my emphasis):

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to be aesthetically pleasing), especially when direct empirical experience is not possible. See further note 98.

[81] At 114d1-115a3, for example, Socrates suggests that the value of his μῦθος lies in its ability to help the philosopher ward off fear and prepare for death in the best way. See note 80.

[82] Socrates' voice should not be assumed to be authoritative, or a mouthpiece for Plato's own views: see note 34. Socrates gives one compelling viewpoint and a voice of optimism in circumstances that might otherwise arm the simplistic view that Plato dislikes representation and the arts.

[83] Consider a related idea (with different emphasis) at *Cri.*107a6-107e5: when it comes to a topic about which listeners are inexperienced and ignorant (such as 'the gods'), a speaker has an abundance of things to say and can get away with indistinct and deceptive illusionism.

[84] Or else we might get in a muddle: see Annas (1982: 125), 'the message is blurred'.

[85] On the different levels of attention in ekphrasis: Becker (1995: 41-44).

[86] 'A truly transcendental perspective': Clay (2000: 175).

> ὅτι μέντοι ἢ ταῦτ' ἐστὶν *ἢ τοιαῦτ' ἄττα* περὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν καὶ τὰς οἰκήσεις, ἐπείπερ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὖσα, τοῦτο καὶ πρέπειν μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ἄξιον κινδυνεῦσαι οἰομένῳ οὕτως ἔχειν…
>
> however, it seems fitting to me that things are like this, or else *something like this*, as regards our souls and their dwelling places (since, at any rate, the soul is clearly something immortal) and it seems worth someone's risk to think that things are like this.

Let us consider the texture of Socrates' ekphrastic *muthos* of the afterlife, asking not 'why this?' but 'why *like* this?' Though all words form part of a wider conversation between Phaedo and Echecrates, Socrates' extended speech is also a monologue embedded within Phaedo's narrative. This begs the question, why confront death in monologue? Four interconnected strands emerge: privilege, poetics, isolation and consciousness.

First, privilege. Monologue does not necessitate monophony but it can, unlike dialogue, accommodate it. Though utterances respond and anticipate response,[87] in monologue one speaker dominates for a period that is comparatively long, conferring upon her words a solitary tenor.[88] The association between monologue and the sole voice is reflected in scholarship on Plato and more widely, which has drawn links between monologue and tyrannical univocality, in contrast to the opportunity offered by dialogue for exploring different viewpoints.[89] The political angle is less relevant here, but Socrates' sole and unimpeded voice does provide an insight into his privileged experience of death. This sits alongside the broader

[87] Multi-way communication is not inevitably and entirely absent from monologue. As stressed by Mikhail Bakhtin, uttered words are always in dialogue with one another: Bakhtin (1981: esp. 272, 276-77), (2004: 60-102, esp. 92); Greenwood (2008: 16-18).

[88] Though, on the 'inner dialogue of the soul with itself' presented in the *Theaetetus*: Clay (2000: 161).

[89] For a brief history of dialogue as a genre and discussion of its political, social and religious implications and associated theories: Goldhill (2008a: esp. 8-9 on Bakhtin). On the association between form (monologue, for example) and, indeed, writing itself, and authoritarianism in Greek culture, see Blondell (2002: 39-48). Polyphony and democratic potentialities in the 'Socratic' dialogues: Euben (1996: esp. 351-53). See note 10.

relationship in Greek culture between the moment before death and prophecy: while Socrates asserts that he needs no skill in prophecy to say what he does, his venture into the realm of the unknown (and, it seems, his soul's own future) hints at the sort of deathly prophecies we find elsewhere in Greek literature.[90] As he observed at 61d10-e4 (see above), examination of the life beyond and telling stories about it is particularly fitting for someone who is about to die. Monologue is the right form for Socrates when he anticipates his own encounter with death because no one apart from Socrates can speak, whether in corroboration or disagreement. The dying voice is necessarily authoritative by virtue of its privileged perspective. In this respect, for Socrates to speak in monologue illustrates the obstacle that Plato encounters in imagining death from his viewpoint at all.[91]

Moreover, the opportunity to speak his mind unimpeded invites poetic language.[92] Shedding the fetters of accountability, Socrates throws wide his imagination in the creative music of the monologue.

> To love the truth is to dance with death, a dance performed upon the cutting edge of time, that thin line separating one from the abyss, the nothingness that, for the madman, and only for him, must shimmer and vibrate in incandescent waves of pure re-vivifying energy.[93]

This passage is taken from David Ross' reaction to Plato's poetics: in his own expressive soliloquy, Ross mimics a connection that he finds between the language

[90] For example: *Il.* 22.355-360. See further *Ap.* 39c1-d10.
[91] The myth of Er is another way to do it: see the introduction to this thesis. Compare here Budelmann (2018b) on lyric minds and the trust produced by the monological dimension of lyric: 'Greek monody has no false narrators' (p. 241). One important difference between an encounter with death in Socrates' monologue and in a lyric poem is that his monologue is set within a cautionary frame that turns attention upon, and thus undermines, the trust that Socrates' words might otherwise inspire.
[92] Plato's language and the connection between poetry, tyranny and desire in the *Republic*: Murray (2017). Compare the despotic power of dainty beauties (οἱ τρυφῶντες): *Meno* 76b7-c1. Conversely, on dialogue's 'ludic power': Goldhill (2008a: 9).
[93] Ross (2009: 354).

of the philosopher's encounter with death and the vibrant blossoming of his 'proper end'.[94] The poetics of Plato's passage, with its sound effect, imagery and colour,[95] and the impression that the description operates on a figurative rather than literal level,[96] fit with a model that sees the monologue as offering a creative outlet. Plato's poetics resonate with what Kathryn Morgan calls the 'vertigo' of myth, flinging Socrates' *muthos* outside the limitations of human language and existence.[97] In this way, the mythical form and associated texture of Plato's writing at this point enact the necessity of thinking outside the bounds of familiar experience.[98]

The sole voice is also a voice of solitude. Socrates' monologue verbalizes his (forthcoming) severance from the living world and conceptual capabilities of his companions. Impressions of distance and incoherence in his ekphrasis communicate this separation. The one certain thing about the space of death is its distance from the space of life: it is somewhere else.[99] This featured previously in 61e1 where Socrates described death as 'to go away from *home* to *that place*' (ἐκεῖσε ἀποδημεῖν).[100] Here, the space of death is imagined in the most remote terms possible (111e6-112a5):

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[94] Ross (2009: 308).
[95] Interaction of breath and water provides 'terrible and unbearable winds' (112b8-9); water fills the regions of Tartarus like men irrigating (112c3); rivers circle the earth like snakes (112d7); the Stygian river is described as 'wholly a sort of blue-grey colour' (113b8-c1).
[96] Dorter (1982b: 162-75).
[97] Morgan (2000: 6).
[98] See further Morgan (2000: 192-201): Socrates' recourse to myth in the *Phaedo* offers 'a discourse that acknowledges our limitations while providing emotional satisfaction'. Compare Rowe (2007: 108) on the 'soaring freedom of the philosophical soul' in contrast to ordinary non-philosophical perspectives. The value of 'fantastic mimesis' for representation of 'unseen reality' (in contrast to 'eikastic' mimesis, of which the dialogues themselves are an example, which articulates epistemic distance from the truth): Nightingale (2002a). Myth leaves the project open: Clay (2000: 172). See further note 80 above and note 4 on page 6.
[99] On Plato's eschatological chronotopes and the distance and difference (temporal, spatial and epistemic) that they articulate: Nightingale (2002a: 236-44, esp. 239-42). See further Nightingale (2002b: 228-37) on the *Phaedo*'s chronotope as an ecological eschatology of the present, heterotopic and heterochronic.
[100] Similar language of departure: *Cri.* 54a9-10.

ἕν τι τῶν χασμάτων τῆς γῆς ἄλλως τε μέγιστον τυγχάνει ὂν καὶ διαμπερὲς τετρημένον δι' ὅλης τῆς γῆς, τοῦτο ὅπερ Ὅμηρος εἶπε, λέγων αὐτό

τῆλε μάλ', ᾗχι βάθιστον ὑπὸ χθονός ἐστι βέρεθρον·

ὃ καὶ ἄλλοθι καὶ ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ τῶν ποιητῶν Τάρταρον κεκλήκασιν.

One of the gaping chasms of the earth happens to be especially enormous and bores right through the whole earth. This is what Homer is describing when he says it is

very far off, where there is the deepest gulf beneath the earth,

that place which elsewhere too he and many other poets call Tartarus.

The separate space of death is a familiar idea from wider Greek thought, going back at least as far as Homer.[101] Socrates envisages Tartarus as another open mouth (χάσμα) that is the biggest and deepest of all; it could not be deeper because it gapes right through the earth (διαμπερὲς τετρημένον δι' ὅλης τῆς γῆς). The more details Socrates provides, the harder it is to visualise deathly space; instead, visual details evoke a powerful impression of unimaginable deepness, downness, remoteness, separateness. Tartarus is literally 'the place called below/downwards' (τὸν τόπον τὸν δὴ κάτω καλούμενον, 112c1-2).[102] The lowest point of Tartarus is the centre of a deep space that runs right through the earth (112d8-e3):

δυνατὸν δέ ἐστιν ἑκατέρωσε μέχρι τοῦ μέσου καθιέναι, πέρα δ' οὔ· ἄναντες γὰρ ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς ῥεύμασι τὸ ἑκατέρωθεν γίγνεται μέρος.

And it is possible to travel down either way as far as the centre, but not beyond. For the direction of both streams runs uphill on either side.

Tartarus is a Charybdis-like vortex that swallows deeper down and spews back up. All waters that enter it come in lower (κατωτέρω, 112d3) than they exit, some fall 'downwards as far as possible' (εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν κάτω, 112d7-8) before bursting back in (presumably into the living world). Vast Oceanus circles Tartarus on the

[101] For example: *Od.* 24.11-14.
[102] *pace* Rowe (1992) *ad loc*.

'outermost' borders (ἐξωτάτω, 112e7):[103] the space of the dead is not only cut off from the space of the living but also recedes far from that point.

The affective and sensory concentration of Socrates' description continues the impression that an encounter with death is overwhelming, visually and narratologically incoherent.[104] As observed elsewhere, Ἅιδης (Hades) is ἀιδής (unseen).[105] For all the precision with which the landscape of death (the river network) is described, geographical features privilege emotional and sensory impact over visual specificity: Acheron is a flow of pain (ἄχος); Cocytus is a tumbling powerful, plunging, winding shrieking (κωκυτός); the Stygian-coloured lake Styx is a strangely formidable and wild (δεινόν τε καὶ ἄγριον) place of hatred (στύγος) (113b6-c2).[106] Even Pyriphlegethon, a river with vibrant visual impact as an out-breaking, out-falling, circling, winding, fragment-sprouting flaming of fire (πυριφλέγων) (113a6-b6), is not only muddy and clayey (θολερὸς καὶ πηλώδης, 113b1), but also hot and passionate (θολερός). Socrates' ekphrasis communicates a visceral emotional and sensory encounter with death.[107]

This mirrors Phaedo's aesthetic response to the whole of Socrates' final day. As Phaedo prepared for his own monologue-like description of Socrates' death, he observed 'Well then, it was an awesome experience for me to be there' (Καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγενόμενος, 58e1-2), and continued (59a5-9):

[103] Oceanos also mythically circled the earth: Emlyn-Jones and Prendy (2017: 505, n. 131).
[104] See Kotin (2001) on another deliberately complex ekphrasis that represents the philosophy of the work in which it is situated: the shield of Achilles in *Il.* 18.478-608.
[105] For example: Dorter (1982a: 578); Bacon (1990: 156-58), also linking ἄδειν to find a triple pun. Also: *Grg.* 493b4-5, but see *Cra.* 403a5-404b4 for rejection of this link.
[106] These derivations: Emlyn-Jones and Prendy (2017: 505, n. 132). The terrible and fearful nature of names of this sort: *Resp.* 3.387b8-c6.
[107] The physicality of viewing death and its representations: Turner (2016: 145).

> ἀλλ' ἀτεχνῶς ἄτοπόν τί μοι πάθος παρῆν καί τις ἀήθης κρᾶσις ἀπό τε τῆς ἡδονῆς συγκεκραμένη ὁμοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς λύπης, ἐνθυμουμένῳ ὅτι αὐτίκα ἐκεῖνος ἔμελλε τελευτᾶν. καὶ πάντες οἱ παρόντες σχεδόν τι οὕτω διεκείμεθα, τοτὲ μὲν γελῶντες, ἐνίοτε δὲ δακρύοντες…
>
> But it was, quite simply, an extraordinary experience for me and an unfamiliar mixture of pleasure mingled with pain all at once when I reflected upon the fact that he was about to die. And all of us who were there felt more or less like this, one moment laughing, at others crying…

The strangeness of Phaedo's experience in the buildup to Socrates' death (θαυμάσια), and the contradictory mixture of emotions that accompanied that experience (pleasure, pain, laughter, sorrow) is a counterpart to the 'wondrous places' (θαυμαστοί, 108c6) that Socrates describes. The aesthetics of Socrates' ekphrasis articulate the somatic experience of encountering death.[108] What matters, then, is not the content but the way Socrates imagines Tartarus.

The overwhelming impact of death endures in the disorientating impression that Socrates gives of repeated movement from place to place in Tartarus. Socrates' earlier reference to death as a movement from home to an unspecified place (ἐκεῖσε ἀποδημεῖν, 61e1), persists in his picture of perpetual recession from the familiar. The waters of Tartarus flow in and out in an oscillating motion like breathing (112b3-9); rivers flow in circles (112d6-8); souls move from place to place (113d1-114c6), some borne endlessly by rivers in and out of Tartarus in hope of forgiveness by those they wronged (114b2-6). In a similar pattern, Socrates moves from one detail to the next, from Oceanos, to Acheron, to Pyriphlegethon and so on, mimicking the move he will make himself from the familiar to the strange. Socrates extends the moment of death into a series of departures. In this way, the monologue

[108] This includes a philosophical encounter with death, as well as an empirical one. The wonder that accompanies Platonic *theoria*: Nightingale (2004: 259-61). See Hunzinger (2015: esp. 432-33) more generally on the delight and perils of wonder.

operates as an expansion of the instant of encountering death. The temporal stagnation in the eternal present of Socrates' monologue sets his experience apart from that of his companions, which is characterized by forward and backward perspectives.[109] By dwelling on the immediacy of the moment of encounter, Plato communicates both Socrates' experiential isolation from the living and his confrontation with the unfathomable: an eternal instant is conceptually bewildering.

Yet, the adjective θαυμαστός is applied to Socrates' whole description, and therefore covers his ekphrasis not only of Tartarus but also the world of the living and the purer world of the forms. Strangeness is not peculiar to death, but to the human experience of confronting something outside the bounds of human knowledge. This dynamic plays throughout Socrates' ekphrasis via a paradox of negative definition.[110] Contrariness permeates Socrates' description: the four named rivers are in some way 'opposite' one another: καταντικρύ describes the relationship between Oceanos and Acheron at 112e8, Pyriphlegethon and Cocytos at 113b7.[111] Oceanos and Acheron flow in opposite directions (ἐναντίως 112e8); neither Pyriphlegethon nor Cocytos mix their waters (οὐ συμμειγνύμενος τῷ ὕδατι, 113b2-3; καὶ οὐδὲ τὸ τούτου ὕδωρ οὐδενὶ μείγνυται, 113c5-6). Likewise, Tartarus is a prison from which those who cannot be reformed can never escape (ὅθεν οὔποτε ἐκβαίνουσιν, 113e6), but from which those who have lived piously can be 'freed' (ἐλευθερούμενοι, 114b8). This final visualisation is one indication that the entire

[109] For similar language, though making a different point, see Dorter (1982b: 165) on Socrates' myth as 'representing what in our present embodied existence we make of ourselves for all time' and 'present[ing] [the] timeless in a temporal form, or the implicit present in an explicit future'.
[110] Negation holds its own branch of philosophy. See, for example, *Prm.* 161e1-166c5 and *Soph.* 236d9-241b8 on the problem of non-existence; Frede (1992c: 403-12) on the problem of 'not being', with further bibliography in n. 1. It is also poetic. Negativity's possible sublimity, holding apophatic and other powers: Clarkson (2017).
[111] Rowe (1992) on 112e7 proposes that the rivers' exits from Tartarus 'will then be like the four points of the compass somewhere on a horizontal plane across the χάσμα of Tartarus'.

description of Tartarus is to be understood as figurative: the imaginary space of Tartarus parallels Socrates' literal imprisonment pending execution, his soul's imprisonment in his body pending death, and his soul's imprisonment by the senses of the body pending philosophical purification.[112] The prison of Tartarus is contradictory: equal and opposite to the prison of life.

Indeed, the paradox of negative definition seeps deeper through the imagery of Socrates' monologue. The clearest example of this is at 112c3, when Socrates describes the movement of water into the spaces and channels below the earth as like men irrigating (ὥσπερ οἱ ἐπαντλοῦντες). The ordinariness of the image is more startling for its presence in an imaginary world where death is a huge gaping mouth. More generally, Tartarus is full of geographic features from the living world: lakes, rivers, springs, mud and lava. The characteristics of Socrates' imaginary world of death are weighed down by the materiality of the σῶμα.[113] On the one hand, this is not meant to be taken literally: it is a thought-experiment, a figurative illustration of the confines of human life. On the other, it is an expression of imaginative inadequacy.[114] The probability of ekphrastic failure overshadows Socrates' account which, for all its strangeness, relies on imagery drawn from the material world.[115]

[112] An interesting counterpart to this is Dorter (1982b: 165-66) on the Tartarean river network as reminiscent of the circulatory system of the body, rendering 'geography […] a metaphor for biology'. Phaedo's liberation from bondage: Dorter (1982a: 567). For the body as the soul's tomb: Pl. *Grg*. 493a.

[113] Compare his earlier account of the higher regions of the physical cosmos, the supposedly purer earth 'on the earth under the heavens' (110b2). Socrates conjured its wondrous beauty with recourse to spheres made of variegated colourful leather patches, colours like sea-purple, gold, chalk, snow, mountains and rocks like gemstones. See Nightingale (2004: 141-57) on this description and, especially, on reasons to take it seriously (noting that this is not the disembodied world of the Forms, but rather a superior, beautiful realm).

[114] See further note 98.

[115] Ekphrastic indifference: Mitchell (1994: 152). See further Destrée and Edmonds (2017a: 9) on 'philosophically constructed images' and the 'limited perspective of mortals' (citing *Phd.* 114d2-3); Blondell (2002: 48-50) on the embodiment compelled by Plato's dramatic form.

Death's unlikeness simultaneously articulates the sense of wonder and perplexity that Plato imagines Socrates to feel in the face of death and undercuts the privileged view offered by the monologue.[116]

Let us move, finally, from solitude of voice to solitude of mind.[117] One feature of the monologue is the illusion of vacuum.[118] In principle, Socrates addresses a group of listeners (internal and external); in practice, his single voice performs a solitude that undermines his conscious existence. On the one hand, the opening and conclusion of Socrates' full monologue acknowledges the presence of Simmias (110b5; 114c6-9).[119] On the other, his companions do not respond to his monologue at all: Crito, the first to speak after Socrates, moves on to the practicalities of Socrates' last requests. Socrates comments on this oddity (115d2-6, my emphasis):[120]

> ὅτι δὲ ἐγὼ πάλαι πολὺν λόγον πεποίημαι, ὡς, ἐπειδὰν πίω τὸ φάρμακον, οὐκέτι ὑμῖν παραμενῶ, ἀλλ' οἰχήσομαι ἀπιὼν εἰς μακάρων δή τινας εὐδαιμονίας, ταῦτά μοι δοκῶ αὐτῷ ἄλλως λέγειν, παραμυθούμενος ἅμα μὲν ὑμᾶς, ἅμα δ' ἐμαυτόν.
>
> As for the fact that I've been making an extensive argument for a while now that when I drink the hemlock I will not remain with you any longer, but will take my leave, departing for some sort of happiness that belongs to the blessed dead, *it seems to me that I'm saying all this to him in vain*, though I'm attempting to reassure you all, and myself too.

[116] Poetic negativity: note 110.
[117] For literary mediations of a sense of solitude (of mind as well as situation) in another place and time, the age of Virgil, see Kachuk (2021). See further Hutchinson (2007: 23-24) on Polyphemus' monologue as a medium of emotion, isolation and intimacy, and also Chaniotis (2022: esp. 34-36) on night-time solitude (interesting in the context of Socrates' death-bed scene as filling the time before the sun sets: 61e3-4) and Sekita (2022: 43-45) on ancient Greek notions of 'being alone' in the face of death.
[118] *pace* the principle in Bakhtin that every utterance carries 'dialogic overtones': note 87.
[119] There are first person plural verbs and pronouns in Socrates' full monologue which have a similar impact but all fall outside his description of Tartarus: 110c7-8; 111a9; 111a9-111b1; 111b1; 111b5; 111c7; 111c8.
[120] The surface meaning is that Socrates comments on the fact that Crito has failed to understand the arguments pertaining to the immortality of the soul that he has given over the course of the dialogue. However, his observation has especial force in a monologue that has fallen on deaf ears. Noting this silence: Clay (2000: 174). Compare Callicles' declaration that he, like many, is unpersuaded by Socrates' words despite their apparent merits in *Grg.* 513c4-6.

The lack of verbal response from Socrates' companions to his monologue intensifies the solitude inherent in the form. Insofar as Socrates' verbalised confrontation with death seeks a listening counterpart for confirmation of his subjective existence, the vacuum of the monologue that is left hanging teeters upon the extinguishment of identity that Socrates anticipates.[121] This imbues Socrates' reproachful observation with fresh meaning, 'For I've also heard that one should die in silence' (καὶ γὰρ ἀκήκοα ὅτι ἐν εὐφημίᾳ χρὴ τελευτᾶν, 117e1-2), and renders the affective subjectivity of his swan song a last laugh in the face of non-being.[122]

Socrates' monologue, with its poetic privilege, spatial, visual and temporal strangeness, its contradictions and solitude, is self-confessedly imaginative. The irony is that a strangeness that can be explained in terms of cognitive unreliability is also what lends his existential perspective the tenor of authenticity.

CONCLUSION

Much of the philosophical content of the *Phaedo* circles around what death is (and what it is not). In this chapter, I have explored how this explicit philosophical enquiry intersects with the more literary side of Plato's writing to turn attention upon an epistemological challenge.

[121] The lonely voices of the dead souls that call out at 114a6-b1 from the Acherusian lake comprise a poetic foil to Socrates' unanswered voice. However, refer to note 55: Tom Phillips' discussion of the formation of selfhood through 'the interaction between voicing and listening selves' (p. 53) suggests that Socrates' reflection here, 'it seems to me that I'm saying all this to him in vain', constitutes his continued existence (albeit a solitary existence, indicating, perhaps, his incipient withdrawal from the community). See further Holquist (1990: 14-39) on the relationship between dialogue and existence in Bakhtin, including especially the idea that '*I author myself*' (p. 28).

[122] On the final aria of the dying swan: 84e3-85b7. See Crotty (2009: ch. 3) on Socrates' bold assertion in the face of cultural consensus on death as 'the great destabilizer of human existence': 'Do we think that death is a something?'

Plato acknowledges and explores this challenge by choreographing the coexistence, concurrence and contradictions of *logos* in various guises: reasoning (on the immortality of the soul); narrative account (the last day of Socrates); and imaginative description (Socrates' account of the afterlife). In his narrative account, for example, the uncovering, covering and uncovering of Socrates at the end of the dialogue (and his life) echoes the asymptotic frustration of getting close to the moment of death as an outsider. The offering and denial of a face-to-face encounter with another's demise then becomes a counterpart to the give and take in Plato's own mediated verbal account in which he, absent from the real and represented scene, paints a scene of death. Distance in the text reflects an implicit distance at the scene of Socrates' death; ekphrastic failure simulates the impossibility of taking an empirical approach to what death is or is like.

The fantasy of philosophy is that it can shortcut the problems associated with an empirical or mythical approach. But in the *Phaedo* the philosophical arguments also prove inconclusive and unsatisfactory. Combine this with the apparent contradiction between the premise of the narrative account (which tends towards and features Socrates' 'end') and that of the philosophical enquiry (which seeks, and fails, to establish the 'endlessness' of the soul). It is not clear how these conflicting imperatives interrelate. Does the veil hide Socrates' end because he does not end at all? In which case, might the narrative frustration effected by the position of the veil at the climax effect yet another argument in support of the soul's

immortality? Or is the point that anyone eager to see the death of Socrates has been missing the point?[123]

One possibility is that the narrative draw of the ending and the theatrics of its climax invites us to re-consider the premise of the soul's immortality upon which the philosophical discussion has been based.[124] Everyone, it turns out, has been striving to meet a challenge without questioning its basis. Socrates was asked to prove that death is not an end. Phaedo was asked to recreate the end of Socrates. The truth is that no one knows whether death is an ending or not. A pessimistic response to this might point out that all approaches (have been set up to) fail. A more optimistic response might observe that all approaches, despite their ultimate failure, do a pretty good job at meeting the challenge they were set. It might further point out an implicit congruence between some of the arguments in the *Phaedo* and the literary subject. If doing philosophy is practising dying,[125] and if learning is remembering,[126] perhaps reading the *Phaedo* and remembering a death (Socrates' death) is the best way to learn what death is like.[127] To remember Socrates' death is to encounter his death;[128] to remember what he said is to encounter one's own… Indeed, to return to a point I raised in part two of this chapter, the monument of

[123] For the observation that there is irony in Echecrates' talk of 'endings', but also the confident assertion that the 'chief conclusion' of the dialogue is that 'death is not the end', see Rowe (1992) on 57a6.
[124] Compare Socrates' more balanced contemplation of the options in *Apology* 40c6-10 (either death is non-existence with no perception or it is a change, with the soul moving from one place to another).
[125] See note 54.
[126] One argument in the *Phaedo* concerns the idea that all learning (μάθησις) is recollection (ἀνάμνησις) of knowledge that we gained at a previous time (thus proving the pre-existence of the soul in a former life and so its immortality…). See 72e1-78b2. See note 23 on the overlap between narrative and memory.
[127] For another way, see Seneca's suggestion that the experience of fainting might offer an insight into the experience of dissolution in death: Sen. *Ep.* 77.9.
[128] On presence as part of reading mimetically: Ausland (1997: 405).

Plato's text does not just memorialise Socrates; it affords him, through ongoing discourse with readers, the immortality sought in his arguments. In this sense, to remember Socrates' death is to encounter his death *and* the continuation of his life (and, indeed, his apotheosis, in the literary reconstitution of the historical man as the exemplary philosopher, teacher and martyr): the text, in relationship with readers, constitutes and so proves the immortality of the soul?[129] The harmony here is compelling, but does not entirely remove the epistemological problems raised by the dialogue, especially in the context of Plato's other work.

My view is that the features of the dialogue that have made it so compelling as a work of literature, so renowned for its graphic description and immersive narrative, do work in parallel with the philosophical argument. In each case, Plato stages an insurmountable problem (reclaiming a missed experience; knowing what happens when we die) and showcases how far he can, nevertheless, take us as a literary philosopher. The approach (at least when it comes to death) seems both humble and optimistic: 'to look in different ways and to tell tales' (διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν) about travel to/life in that other place (περὶ τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ) (61d9-e4) and thereby (perhaps) to know the truth.[130] All three modes of thinking, logical, empirical and imaginative, together prompt reflection on the mystery of death and the part they might each play in response to it.[131] As Socrates says about suicide (62a1-2):

[129] Note here *Cri.* 106a3-4 on the reality of the artistic creation: τῷ δὲ πρὶν μὲν πάλαι ποτ' ἔργῳ, νῦν δὲ λόγοις ἄρτι θεῷ γεγονότι προσεύχομαι…

[130] For Plato to signal imaginative representation, for example, cannot be reduced to ongoing anxiety as regards truth or reliability, but rather emphasises the role of the imagination where knowledge is impossible.

[131] Plato's framing devices and a resulting 'metadialogue about watching, listening and reading': von Reden and Goldhill (1999: 265-66). See further McCabe (2008: 97-98, 104-106) on fictionality in the dialogues and the self-conscious, active process of reading them; Ferrari (1987) on how the *Phaedrus* works as a whole (including in setting and the behaviours and responses of the characters)

> Ἀλλὰ προθυμεῖσθαι χρή, ἔφη· τάχα γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἀκούσαις.
>
> 'Well you must exert yourself', he said, 'because perhaps you might also hear something.'

The sophistication of this epistemological reflection is to be expected in Plato. It is my contention in this thesis, however, that similarly complex existential meditation is discernible in, and emerges out of, diverse texts and material culture from the classical period that are not ordinarily categorized as philosophical. I begin, overleaf, with painted pots…

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to distinguish attention to substance (in any form) from appreciation of surface and so to stage a discourse on how to do philosophy; McCabe (2010: 3-4, 7-12) on Platonic conversations and reflective frames; Möllendorff (2013: 405-9) on Plato on authorial procedure in the *Theaetetus*. Compare the power of lyric polyphony to link real time events (via vivid illusion and emotional immediacy) with reflection via the text as a 'stylized aesthetic comparandum of the occurrence it memorializes': Phillips (2018: esp. 192). Similarly, on a double response provoked by ekphrasis (illusion and defamiliarization): Becker (1995: 84-86).

CHAPTER TWO

THEY DO IT WITH MIRRORS?

ENCOUNTERING DEATH THROUGH PAINTED POTS

> Time which antiquates Antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these *minor* Monuments. In vain we hope to be known by open and visible conservatories, when to be unknown was the means of their continuation and obscurity their protection […] But the iniquity of oblivion blindely scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity.
>
> Sir Thomas Browne, *Urne Buriall*[1]

Painted pots are visible, tangible objects; they are not, ordinarily, works of philosophy. In these obvious senses they differ from a Platonic dialogue such as the *Phaedo*.[2] In this chapter, I will probe this difference. I will explore how fifth-century material culture of this sort does, in its own way, mediate reflection on the existential enigma of death, not just in its images, but in its medium.

The relationship between pots and death in ancient Greece is a long one. The surfaces of pots were frequently painted with images of dying and dead bodies; pictures of ancient Athenian funerary ritual (*prothesis* and *ekphora* scenes) are notable here.[3] But the relationship runs deeper: pots are more than surfaces on which images of dead and dying bodies can be shown. Consider the enduring association between pots and the human body: man's mythological origins were in

[1] Browne (1958: 43, 46).
[2] Compare Pottier (1883: 7), who used *lekythoi* as evidence for funerary behaviours and 'popular' belief but distinguished them from works of philosophy.
[3] Depictions on vases from the funerary sphere through the geometric, archaic and classical periods: Kurtz (1984). See further: Osborne (1988: 5-6); Shapiro (1991); Lissarrague (2001: 112-22); note 31.

earth, and pots can serve in urn-burials as containers for the corpse or ashes.[4] More playfully, drinking cups are given bodily features such as eyes.[5] Pots, then, do not just show bodies, but are bodies. And, like bodies, they are fragile; they might return to dust.[6] Or they might, paradoxically, endure, as Sir Thomas Browne mused in my epigraph:[7] like the immortality that Plato constructs for Socrates in the *Phaedo*, grave markers such as the Eleusis amphora or the monumental stone *lekythoi* that emerge towards the end of the fifth century lay a claim to memory.[8] In this double sense, in what they show and what they are, pots are potentially powerful mediators of meditation on death.

This is the focus of my chapter. By studying some painted pots made in classical Athens, I will explore how the images and marks on the surface of a pot, its compositions, its shape and material form mediate existential and epistemological reflection. Thus, as set out in the introduction to this thesis, this chapter is in dialogue with two branches of scholarship in the history of classical art: approaches that attend to formal meaning and reflexivity, and thanatological approaches to funerary art that link material objects with mental attitudes and experiences.[9] In

[4] See Hesiod *Theogony* 571-72 on Prometheus' formation of Pandora. An example of an urn-burial is provided by the seventh-century BCE Eleusis amphora, which held the remains of a boy: see, for example, Osborne (1988); Grethlein (2015: 204-5), (2018: 77-85, esp. n. 14).
[5] For examples see note 34. Note further Boardman (1988: 172) on Greek anthropomorphisation of pottery.
[6] On human bodies as transient objects that return to dust (as part of an embodied approach to classical Attic grave stelai), see Squire (2018b: 519). See further Turner (2016: 143). For new materialist and embodied approaches to death, see notes 27, 55 and 59 on pages 16, 32 and 33.
[7] Browne (1958: 43, 46). Sir Thomas Browne's 17th century meditation on death responded to the discovery of bones in some pots in Walsingham, England. His writings exemplify a dynamic at the heart of my thesis: the possibility of imagining the unknowable from the knowable (in his case, ideas about death from mortal remains and antiquities).
[8] See notes 4 and 102.
[9] Frames: Platt and Squire (2017), especially the chapter by Clemente Marconi; earlier discussions in Hurwit (1977), (1992). Ornament: Dietrich and Squire (2018). Reflexivity in early vase painting: Neer (1995), (2002); Grethlein (2015), (2016); Jones (2015). On mirrors, invisibility, the frontal gaze, and the Gorgon, see Vernant (1985: esp. 82), (1987); Frontisi-Ducroux (1988), (1989: 157-

finding reflections 'on' as well as 'of' death on painted pots, this chapter pursues methods that treat material culture not just as a reflection of socio-political reality and ritual practice but also as an instantiation, mediation and driver of thought.[10] Deep-set is an emphasis on how objects such as pots are generative of ideas through their relations with humans and other objects but are not capable of being reduced to their core meaning or 'essence'.[11] In this respect, pots can operate as sophisticated models of the problem of death by virtue of being objects at all; like another person's body or bones, they are a suggestive, though ultimately inaccessible, enigma.

I focus on two popular pot types from classical Athens: drinking cups (*kylikes*) and oil flasks, often used as funerary jugs (*lekythoi*). I look first at drinking cups, and consider how this sort of open vessel might offer a portal onto visualisations of death in the symposium. Although the cups that I discuss, like many from this period, were mostly (possibly all) found in Italy, it is reasonable to think that cups of this sort were used in Athens as well as overseas.[12] They offer some of our best evidence on Athenian sympotic experience. Nevertheless, it is important that painters and potters in Attica may not only have been influenced by the preferences

64), (1993), (1995: esp. 65-75). See pages 32-33 (including notes 55, 56 and 57) and notes 19, 39, 42, 48 and 67 below.

[10] On this dynamic, see Clifford and Buxton (Forthcoming b). Greek vases as negotiating not incarnating ideologies: Neer (2002: 183-85).

[11] For bibliography on object-oriented ontology, see notes 26 and 58 on pages 15 and 33. See further note 9 on page 39.

[12] The initial purpose or surroundings of much Athenian pottery is uncertain. Many Attic pots were found in graves in Italy, and so were ultimately viewed by non-Athenian viewers. This includes two cups that I discuss here: the Louvre cup (from Vulci) and the *pelike* (possibly from Chiusi). It probably also includes the Getty cup, which has an Etruscan inscription under the foot. Since I am interested in general pictures of how painters (and these were in Attica, if not necessarily Athenian) dealt with death and the nature of the visual experiences produced, it is acceptable to use these pots as evidence for Athenian visuality; the wider market and specific destination of any one example is not explored further here. A similar approach (but overconfident in dismissing influence from the 'omnivorous' Etruscan market): Osborne (2018: 40-48).

of, for example, the Etruscan market but aware that the pots that they made and sold might end up in Etruscan graves.[13] Drinking cups are not obviously functionally related to death in an Athenian context, but thoughts of death may well have imbued multiple moments in their life history, from production in Attica to use at the symposium or beside an Athenian grave,[14] or else use in an Etruscan context, including eventual deposit in a tomb. Much of what I discuss here would therefore also be true in a funerary context (even intensified by increased emotional and physical proximity) though without contributions from elements such as drinking songs.

Lekythoi, by contrast, are more obviously associated with death in that, in the fifth century at least, they were often used in a funerary context.[15] Many were found in graves, where they were deposited with the dead, and images of these vessels (appearing upon the pots themselves) show them brought to the grave or left upon it. It is possible that they were used for libations during and after the funeral and subsequently deposited as gifts or simply left behind. This context, combined with the distinct subjects and technique that emerge in the second quarter of the fifth century and bloom in the subsequent decades, generates encounters with death that

[13] See Bundrick (2019: esp. chs. 1-3 and 7). Pots and trade: Gill (1988), (1991); Bresson and de Callataÿ (2013); Sapirstein (2013). Mannack (2014: 122) notes the possibility that some kalos-names may have been inspired by agents in trade: if true, this would support the idea that some painters adapted their work to suit purchasers. A related question is the evidence for a market in pottery and the question of value. Without raising painted pottery to anachronistically high levels of 'fine art' (though see Spivey (2018: 57) on this point), views at the other end of the spectrum (initially championed by Vickers (1985)) are also implausibly extreme. It is probable that painted pottery held value and that there were more and less expensive examples. Potter and patron: Webster (1972). Potters' wealth: Wagner (2000). Pots' aesthetic value: Porter (2012).

[14] Though other varieties of pot were more closely associated with funerary contexts (see note 15), there is visual evidence that cups were used at and deposited on Athenian graves: see *BAPD* 216333. Note further the white-ground cups deposited in the 'Sotades tomb' in Athens: see Tsingarida (2012); Burn (1985).

[15] On the funerary context of *lekythoi*, see Oakley (2004: 9-11). In the late archaic and classical periods, the types closely associated with funerary contexts were *loutrophoroi* and the *aryballos*, *alabastron* and *lekythos*. Religious practice and ancestral tombs: Parker (2005: 23-31).

are more immediate, familiar and reflexive. Images involve fewer corpses, more graves; less myth, more daily life; fewer heroes, more women; less black expanse, more colours and lines.[16] Death is still prominent, even central, but the focus shifts from anticipation of death, the moment of dying and display of the deceased's corpse, to his or her memorial,[17] to encountering the dead through the intersecting prisms of memory and relations with objects.[18] In the second half of my chapter, then, I consider the contributions made by individual *lekythoi* to the collective reverie of a funerary corpus.

Three themes permeate my chapter. One is a fixation on revelation and concealment of the dead: what is and is not visible? The second concerns the lived experience of death: how does temporality (death as something to be anticipated or remembered) pervade how pots work as visual experiences for their viewers and handlers? Third, I focus more explicitly on the epistemological meditations that are provoked by a pot's medium.[19] This is where the notion of the material world as a mediator of concept-formation comes to the fore, because it is the crafted substance of the pot

[16] An overview of the shift in funerary scenes from the *prothesis* or *ekphora* to the tomb visit and the predominance of women: Bažant (1985: 24-26, 62-68). The purpose, shape, technique, subjects and style of *lekythoi*: Beazley (1938). An increased interest in women in the fifth century: Webster (1972: 241). The marginal figures that accompany Charon: Sourvinou-Inwood (1987: 153-55).

[17] On the centrality, since the geometric period, of remembrance and honour in Athenian attitudes to the dead (the *geras thanonton*): Walter-Karydi (2015). On heightened emphasis in the archaic period on the contribution made by a grave monument to memory of the deceased, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1995: 140-41).

[18] See especially Estrin (2016), (2018). Suggesting that mourners '*see* differently': Turner (2016: 151).

[19] This approach builds on that in Neer (2002: esp. 1-8), and in recent volumes on frames and ornament: note 9. I follow Neer (2002: 7-8) in believing that close readings, though inevitably selective, are most illuminative of meanings produced by pots as a whole. A close reading must pull together style and subject: Elsner (2018a: 386) (equally applicable to Greek art). Formalism and aesthetic experience: Grethlein (2017: esp. 37-38). Vases and illusionism: Martens (1992). Realism and formalism in the long classical period: Webster (1939a). Opposing perspectives on the visual experience offered by classical art: Elsner (2006) on imaginative, vicarious viewing; Osborne (2018: esp. 249-50) on Athenian pottery as a 'mirror' not a 'keyhole'. While sculpture may tell a different story from pots, 'efforts to fragment the picture-field' (Neer (2002: 5)) draw attention to the other-worldly site of the painted object, demanding some projection by viewers into the field.

that makes it both a canvas for thought and a commentary on the materiality, but ultimately the enigma, of death. As an artefact, the pot stands as an aesthetic foil that simulates, or mirrors, for viewers the (im)possibility of extrapolating a subjective or objective experience from a position of outsider.[20]

DRINKING CUPS

REVELATIONS

I begin with a red-figure cup held at the John Paul Getty Museum in Malibu (FIGURE 2.1A).[21] Dated to approximately 490-470 BCE, it falls at the end of what is traditionally considered to be the archaic stylistic period, on the cusp of transition to the classical. Though in some ways exceptional, it sits within a tradition of black- and red-figure pot painting and stands as a multivalent point of reference for visualisations later in the century.

[20] This situation might be described as a position of voyeurism in that it is characterised by desire and phantasy: see Lacan's 1964 *Seminar XI*, discussed in Elsner (2004: 164-71). See further Fowler (2000: 193-217) on monuments, desire and instability.

[21] *BAPD* 275946; *Para* 367.1 *bis.; Add*[2] 224. The Brygos Painter: Arias (1962: 336). A note on attribution: there has been much resistance to approaches that treat pots like Renaissance masterpieces. A historical overview of the study of Greek pots: Osborne (2018: 26-36). See further: Robertson (1992: 1-6); Sparkes (1996). Beazley versus Pottier: Rouet (2001). Classical images: Smith (2002). Though only one of a pot's important aspects, style *is* important. Art history of style in the ancient world and the advantages of a more open method and approach: Elsner (1998). See further Tanner (2006). At the least, attributions provide a shorthand reference for pot identities, chronology and stylistic traits; they also reveal common visualities and networks of interaction.



FIGURE 2.1A

Getty cup (interior).

Attic red-figure *kylix*, attributed to the Brygos Painter. 490-470 BCE.

Height 11.2cm, Diameter 39.1cm, Width 39.1cm.

Etruscan inscription beneath the foot.

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu: 86.AE.286.

Photo: Getty Open Content.

At the centre of its interior are two figures. On the horizontal axis lies the nude figure of a man: his body extends across the tondo's field, cutting its border with his feet. His body is prostrate, both uncomfortably bent and in unfolded

abandonment; his head is thrown back, pupils rolled upwards, mouth gaping open.[22] He is manifestly dead: quelling any doubts, a sword protrudes from his torso, driven through from his back. At the top right of the tondo (on this orientation) is the sword's counterpart, its ornate but empty sheath. Above him, a female figure stands at a slight angle that brings her body into a relationship with the corpse. She holds some bordered fabric, and this cloth is what the painter has depicted at the image's centre, in the middle of the circle of the cup's interior, midway between the figures. Stretched between their bodies, it disrupts a connection that was already broken by their divergent lines of sight. Below, two lines comprised of repeated arched strokes form ground-lines.[23] It has been suggested that these represent a sheep skin.[24] The scene is widely accepted as representing Tecmessa covering Ajax's corpse.[25]

Death is horrifyingly, captivatingly visible. The shock of the face-to-face encounter is quite literally a central concern. As Susanne Turner emphasises in her chapter on sight and death in the ancient world, there was a powerful visibility to death that was heightened by the living's responses to it.[26] There is much to say on the striking *visibility* of Ajax's corpse here. His outstretched nude body is embedded in an iconographical tradition of the 'dead on display',[27] exemplifying a heroic-

[22] Refraction of the eye in death: Geroulanos and Bridler (1994: 53). Compare: *BAPD* 202631. See note 69 on page 60.
[23] The challenge of the ground line in a circular object: Squire (2018a: 6-7). Tondo compositions: Webster (1939b). Images and circularity: Lissarrague (2009).
[24] *BAPD* 275946. *pace CVA* Malibu 8, USA 33: 33, pls. 418-20 (M. B. Moore), proposing a 'pebbly beach'. Further discussion: Williams (1980: 140).
[25] Despite the sword (visible even in the pot's fragmented state) the figures were previously interpreted as Clytemnestra and Agamemnon: *Para* 367.1 *bis*; von Bothmer (1969: 234-35, caption 11). The misidentification probably arose on account of the rarity of stretched fabric in pot images (note 36) by comparison with its prominence in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Dyfri Williams identified a similar scene on the exterior of some cup fragments in the Louvre: Williams (1980).
[26] Turner (2016).
[27] Death's visuality, the *prothesis* and the spectacular: Turner (2016: esp. n. 1, 145-46). Fifth-century Athenian funerary ritual: Kurtz and Boardman (1971: ch. 7); Oakley (2004: 11-13).

mythological trope of the beautiful dead,[28] like Sarpedon,[29] or Memnon,[30] and a social-artistic tradition of honouring the dead with ritual spectacle in scenes of laying out the dead (the *prothesis*) and the funeral procession to the grave (the *ekphora*), which arrange the corpse and frame it with lamentation.[31] Moreover, and more specifically, the painter has apparently prioritised the frontal spectacle of Ajax's dead body on Tecmessa over a realistic depiction of his death.[32] The sword has been driven through his back, a remarkable feat for a suicide.[33]

[28] *kalos thanatos*: Frel (1984 : 13-16); Vernant (1991a); Loraux (1995: ch. 3). But note Neils (2009): is beauty in the eye of the beholder or, rather, the Western tradition as influenced by the pietà image in Christian art? An epic link between death's horror and glory: Vernant (1996). Generic appeal of heroic death: Marconi (2004a). Opposite interpretation: Osborne (2004). Greater artistic reflection on heroic death in the late sixth- and early fifth- century: Muth (2008: 435-36).

[29] For example: *BAPD* 187. Thanatos in Greek art: Shapiro (1993: 132-65); Recke (2002: 60-64). There are a few other instances where Hypnos and/or Thanatos appear on cups; see 200474, 201052, 46679 (possibly: the cup is fragmentary), and 331676 (all these are dated 525-475 BCE and none show the scene in the tondo). Comparing 187 and 7043: Stansbury-O'Donnell (1999: 103-6). Examples that turn Sarpedon's corpse outwards: 201052 (cup), 17489 (mug), 5133 (*lekythos*). Compare: 330735 (*lekythos*), 305529 (amphora), 202217 (krater), 7309 (amphora). Others play differently with the corpse as image: for example 7309 opposes it with the *eidolon* in miniature reflection.

[30] For example: *BAPD* 202501, 205119. In a cup's tondo: 46679, 205119. He is always nude (in 11 Greek examples): De Puma (1983: 294). Eos and Memnon: Recke (2002: 64-67). Achilles and Penthesilea (another sort of longing for a beloved departed): 201987, 211565. In a cup's tondo: 3881, 211565. A similar theme: 205060. Distinct but connected is the association between marriage and death on *loutrophoroi*: Moesch (1988).

[31] For example: 41079. Compare 201675 and 202188, where women lean forward to cradle the head of the deceased (corporeal framing that is equivalent to Tecmessa's open gesture on the Getty cup, but which more effectively succeeds in the face-to-face encounter that she misses). *prothesis* in geometric art: Snodgrass (1987: 14); Walter-Karydi (2015: 30-48). In the archaic period: Walter-Karydi (2015: 112-18). Iconography of mourning: Shapiro (1991). The ritual lament at the *prothesis*: Alexiou (2002: 4-7 and *passim* in 131-205). *prothesis* and display: Lissarrague (2001: 116-17); Turner (2016: 145-46). Beauty and ornament of the dead in *prothesis*: Giudice (2015: 11). *prothesis* on plaques: Boardman (1955); Mommsen (1984). Medical and legal reasons for displaying the deceased: Garland (1985: 30-1); Kurtz and Boardman (1971: 143-44). Identification of specific family members: *CVA* Berlin 15, Germany 95: 52, pls. 48.1-52.2) (A. Schöne-Denkinger). Disruption by *lekythoi* of the popular *prothesis* scene: Allen (2018). Rarity of *prothesis* scenes on *lekythoi*: Haywood (1997). A histogram showing significant increase in preference for funerary scenes in the fifth century: Giudice and Giudice (2009).

[32] But not his face: note 31.

[33] Compare: British Museum 1867,0508.1328; Louvre Collection Campana, 1861, E 635 (Eurytios krater). See further *LIMC* 'Aias I' XXV, 6. One explanation: Hedreen (2001: 110).

The cup's composition maximises this visual prominence. Unlike many other vessels, it has an interior site of display, the tondo.[34] The painted black surround forms a tenebrous circle against which the designs, reserved in red clay ground, shine like a target for the eye.[35] The surface of Ajax's corpse is a bright expanse, largely unmarked, bordered by the black outlines of his body. Add to this the border of rings and repetitive patterns, an ornamental window onto the image, and Tecmessa's open gesture as she stretches the veil, her arms a framing cradle for the corpse. Her posture, leaning towards Ajax, and her gaze direct our eyes onto his features: the visual pull of her lover's corpse on her models the aesthetic draw of his bright, framed body on us. The threefold gaze of painter, internal and external viewer upon the deceased sets his spectacle centre stage.

So visibility is important here. But just as important is how the painter deals with death's *absence*, *invisibility* and *unknowability*, problems that attend and are intensified by what is visible. The veil depicted in the tondo's centre both lifts to reveal the deceased and drops to conceal him from view, two coexistent potentialities.[36] Frame and fabric, envelopes that display and enclose, are in reciprocal complement, setting the mood for a play of revelation and concealment in viewing and visualising a corpse and reflecting upon death.

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[34] This is revealed by its decoration and, sometimes, the presence of eyes on the exterior: the terracotta mask is a comic testament to the face behind that gazes into the pot's interior. Consider, for example: *BAPD* 4507, 7886, 9765. Though multiple pictorial areas demand numerous viewpoints and active viewing (see Lorenz (2016: esp. 169-97) on a *hydria*) the tondo also offers visual repose.

[35] Note early 'extramissionist' notions of vision and the active 'fiery eye', discussed in Rudolph (2016: 39).

[36] Based on a review of 500-400 BCE tondo images in the *BAPD*, I have found only one other example with a suspended veil: 217255. On this, display and concealment potentialities are teasingly erotic. The *himation* across the tondo's centre conceals the youth's nude body and the pot's only painting, and so is a double joke on viewers' expectations: draining the wine unveils a blank image.

On the one hand, concealment of Ajax's body has an obvious narrative imperative. His self-inflicted death is a cause for shame, a scandal to be covered up.[37] As such, Tecmessa's gesture is unambiguous: Ajax's suicide is 'absolutely not to be seen', οὔτοι θεατός (as in Sophocles' probably later rendition).[38] The natural interpretation is that she conceals. Indeed, the veil that might hide the corpse aligns internal and external viewers, but in mutual frustration: it is impossible to be sure whether Tecmessa's sight falls on her lover's face or shroud.[39] On the other hand, the empty sheath serves as a foil for the veil, a covering that has exposed the naked instrument of death.[40] The veil becomes a spatial and figurative epicentre of the tondo and the dead body, a painted analogue of the dark wine that fills and drains like blood, at one time exposing, at another hiding the painted corpse. But the corpse itself belongs to death's aftermath not dying itself and so, visible or not, points towards an invisible concept.[41] Contradictory impulses of revelation and concealment in the tondo's image thus help sketch a mental abstraction, the moment of death.[42] And in a symposium, where dead bodies and death are both visually absent, the conceptual link between what is seen and what is imagined is mediated instead by a cultural object. This object simulates, by artistic representation

[37] Compare how faces are covered in shame: Eur. *HF* 1159-60.
[38] Soph. *Aj.* 915.
[39] Note Frontisi-Ducroux (1986), (1989: 160-61), (1993: 74-75), (1995: 82-94) on the existential significance of the frontal gaze: here, the missed connection 'diverts' (*détourne*) the dead from internal *and* external viewers. Perhaps this captures the aftermath, where the dead 'no longer sees, no longer is seen' by anyone (citations translated from Frontisi-Ducroux (1986: 208)). See note 9.
[40] In fact, like the veil, the scabbard has a double impact. It has exposed the weapon, but also signals the possibility that it might be covered; this is enhanced by its position, hanging in mid-air as if the scene in the cup's interior takes place indoors or, at least, in private (in contrast to the scenes on the cup's exterior). For further discussion of indoor/outdoor space inside/outside another cup by the Brygos painter (discussed below), see Hutchinson (2020b: 115).
[41] See Jones (2015: 818) on Sarpedon's corpse for a similar point.
[42] Death, invisibility and coverings: Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 35-38); note 9. See further Trimble (2018: 346) on the open door on the crane relief in the Tomb of the Haterii.

(pictorial and material), the double process of perceiving and creating inherent in concept formation.

Stop all the Clocks

With this shift from the result of death to its concept, I move on to the deathly visualities provoked by a cup's temporal games. Let us return to the veil at the tondo's centre. Does it lift to display death as the awaited climax of a story, a life, and a drink? Or fall as a shroud, a signal that life and shame are over? What we see is a corpse and not the hero; no *eidolon* floats in the darkness above its sightless head but rather the lifeless shell of the scabbard, an artefact that acts as mirror image of the body that is only Ajax in so far as the living recreate and remember him in their minds.[43]

This is a sequential conflict that images on the pot's exterior anticipate and recall (Figure 2.1b). Imagine that the cup is full, and the tondo concealed. On one side is a voting scene with draped male figures holding staffs, a quintessential image of Athenian citizenship in action.[44] Though the pot is fragmented, it is possible to identify on the left the bottom half of a female figure wearing the *aegis*: Athena. A scene at home in fifth-century Athens is also part of a mythological narrative, a conclusion supported by the presence of the male spectator on the right, who

[43] *eidola*: Peifer (1989). Though an image might perpetuate presence: see note 110.
[44] Cleisthenic resonances here: Spivey (1994); Bocksberger (2022: 167-74). Sticks and citizen iconography: Hollein (1988: 11-49); Fehr (2011: 84-91, esp. n. 340).

clutches his forehead in a gesture, perhaps of horror, concern, despair, or mourning.[45]



FIGURE 2.1B

Getty cup (exterior).

See caption to FIGURE 2.1A.

Another clue to the narrative and mythological significances of this scene from contemporary life appears on the other side. Male figures are again present, and the repetition of a central figure with an identical sceptre suggests that these are the

[45] This figure is identified as Ajax in *CVA* Malibu 8, USA 33: 34 (M. B. Moore). Compare the seer on the East pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia.

same men, but the block and voting pebbles are gone. Instead, weapons have been drawn and some figures prevent others from fighting. The suspended sword and spear in the fight scene perhaps point to the quarrel's origin: the arms of Achilles. Both sides can be integrated as two moments in, or two versions of, the same story: resolution of competing claims by Odysseus (hence the presence of Athena) and Ajax for that armour.[46] The despairing, mourning, horrified figure in the voting scene looks *backward* (to Achilles' death, a narrative starting point) *and forward* (to Ajax's death, a narrative climax that cannot be unveiled until the wine is drunk). Provided the cup is full, the moment of death remains a wine-dark blank approached obliquely from two emotional viewpoints.[47] Reflections on the liquid surface send back the face of the living observer.[48]

Now imagine the cup is empty.[49] The exposed tondo offers respite from the temporalities of the exterior space and its imperatives to view in sequence, to compare and contrast (FIGURE 2.1A). The magnetic absorption of the circular field accommodates a pause for reflection, offering Ajax's corpse as the cessation of life and change. But then the wine that fills and covers the body performs a figurative shrouding, a funerary rite in response to death. The exterior scenes (FIGURE 2.1B) work once more but through the lens of memory, a past story of a death (or two)

[46] Davies (1973: 68) places Odysseus on the left, Ajax on the right. Compare: *BAPD* 203901, 205070. The vote/quarrel combination was popular on Attic cups, especially on a late archaic series that also makes Ajax and the arms of Achilles its subject: see especially Williams (1980) (though he argues for inspiration from a lost literary source).
[47] Though Garland (1985: 13-20) emphasised death as a process, dying might still be an instant. Late archaic to early classical interest in the suddenness ('Plötzlichkeit') of transition between two states: Wannagat (2003: esp. 61-64). The absence of a Greek agent of death: Vermeule (1979: 37). The pain of anticipating loss: Konstan (2018).
[48] Wine as mirror: Frontisi-Ducroux (1997: 114-16).
[49] Conceivably, the tondo image might emerge from the wine upside down. In this respect, the 'correct' way to hold the cup is with the voting scene facing the drinker and the fight scene facing outwards.

told by the living. Looking back on death, the realm of remembrance and mourning, is expressed in an intersection between the contemporary and mythological.[50] Though interpretations of scenes such as this one often emphasise the difference between the pot's sides (and the implicit narrative of socio-political development from resolution by violence to resolution by vote),[51] death, as motivation for and result of both scenes, also complicates demarcations. Ajax's death, like Achilles' death, is idiosyncratic. This is exemplified by the singular spectacle of the tondo, which holds one man's death within its enclosure; its circular plane is complete and separate from the cup's other planes. But his death is also one of many; it inherits and produces a tradition of deaths.[52] Ajax dies in his own way and like Achilles (and countless others).[53] If the despairing figure mourns, he mourns Ajax and Achilles' death simultaneously. For a subject drinking at a symposium, this theme might chime with popular drinking-songs in orbit, such as those to Ajax 'the best of the Greeks to come to Troy after Achilles':[54] to celebrate and remember Ajax in word or image is also to think of Achilles, two mighty warriors who died at Troy.[55] The mythological and temporal doubling effects graphically a similar conceptual link between, on the one hand, stories and images of death and corpses on a pot, and, on the other hand, the real existential problem of death as remembered and

[50] A similar idea of merged mythology and reality in the face of death: Carboni (2007: 33).
[51] See for example: Williams (1980); Spivey (1997: 180).
[52] A similar composition on a scarab gem in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston shows an outspread nude male being (un)covered by a winged deity: see *LIMC* 'Aias I' no. 141 and Odette Touchfeu's suggestion that this derives from a confusion with Eos and Memnon. The appeal of the motif appears to facilitate permeability between stories and deaths.
[53] On this point, see especially Elsner (2006: 75-77) on the referential indeterminacy of *kouroi* (simultaneously personal-individual and epic-universal).
[54] *carmina convivalia* 898 *PMG*. Aristophanes cites a song 'of Telamon' in *Lys.* 1236-38. *skolia* of this sort were probably in circulation in the late sixth and early fifth centuries: Yatromanolakis (2009: 271-75). See further Arist. 842 *PMG*, vv. 13-14.
[55] Associations between Ajax and other characters in Sophocles' play: Swift (2019). Visual links between the voting and Ajax and Achilles' game: Hedreen (2001: 104-19).

anticipated by a drinking subject for himself or his contemporary Athenians.[56] On a pot that focuses on seeing the dead in its tondo, visualisation of death is a construct of realities and temporalities.

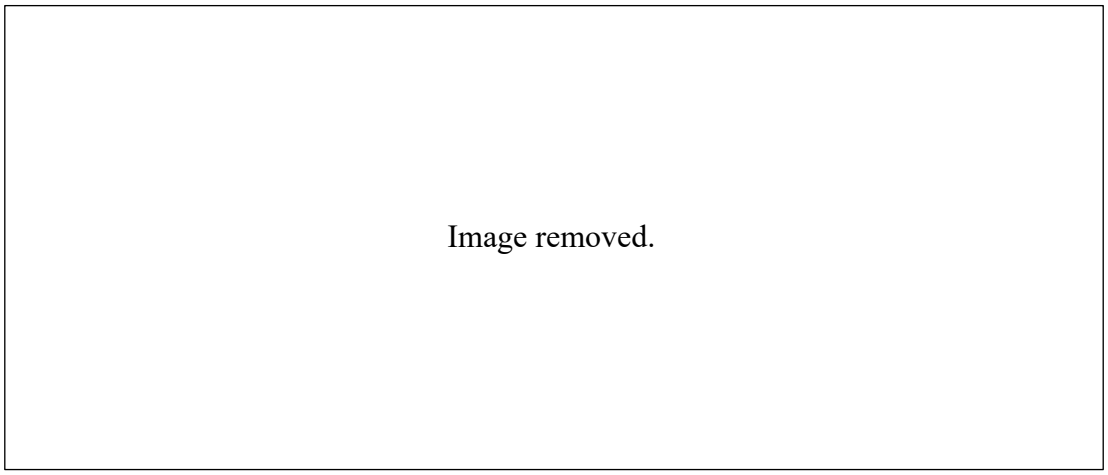


FIGURE 2.2A

Louvre cup (Iliupersis).

Attic red-figure *kylix*, attributed to the Brygos Painter. 500-450 BCE.

Height 13.8cm, Diameter 33cm, Width 42cm.

Found in Italy (Etruria, Vulci).

Musée du Louvre, Paris: G152.

Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Stéphane Maréchalle.

[56] Death of the other as mirror and prefiguration of the subject's self, mortality and death (discussing images of Charon with the dead on *lekythoi*): Sourvinou-Inwood (1987: 150-58).

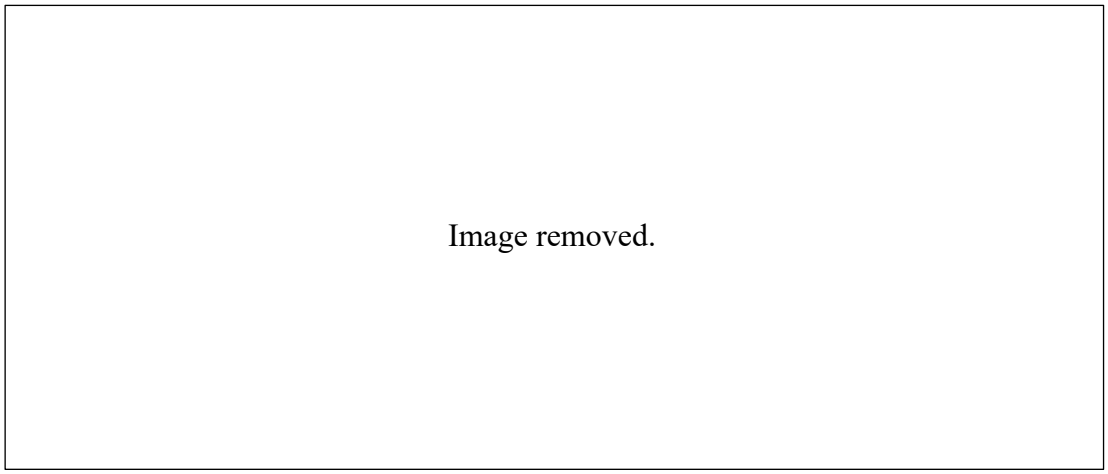


FIGURE 2.2B

Louvre cup (Iliupersis, with Priam).

See caption to FIGURE 2.2A.

Consider another red-figure cup (FIGURES 2.2A-b), also attributed to the Brygos Painter.[57] This provides an intriguing example of the existential implications of repetition. The Iliupersis scenes on its exterior are charged with duplications and inversions that provoke meditation upon death as ineludible end.[58] On one side of the pot (FIGURE 2.2A), the central figure of a vigorously victorious Greek warrior stands astride his prostrate enemy. This figure is paired with (on the pot's other side, FIGURE 2.2B) the debilitated old man Priam,[59] his arms outstretched in supplication towards the warrior's double that strides in from the right. The boy Astyanax twins himself, appearing on the far right of each side's scene (this double

[57] *BAPD* 203900; Beazley (1925: 176.3); *ARV*[2] 369.1, 398, 1649; *Para* 365.1; *Add*[2] 224.
[58] This cup, death's climax and the 'Noch-nicht-und-doch-schon-Gestorben' (not-yet-but-already-died): Wannagat (2003: 63).
[59] Though the composition resists fragmentation into 'sides': see Robertson (1992: 94) on the fallen warrior beneath one handle, who links the action that begins and ends with a palmette beneath the other. The continuous mode: Froning (1988: 194-95).

appearance is unusual):[60] on one side he is named and draped, his hair elegantly arranged and his body leaning out to the right in opposition to the oblique angle of his mother's body as she raises both arms bent back over her head, brandishing a pestle; on the other, he is unnamed and naked, his hair loosely outspread and his body dangling and inverted such that his arms meet at an acute angle the legs of the warrior that wields him, forming another triangle in reverse.[61] Visual switches of victor and vanquished are saturated with deaths anticipated or remembered in a relentless cycle. The boy who might escape looks back towards the left from the palmette that might mark his narrative's end. He thus looks, ultimately, towards his own death on the other side of the pot, visually past, logically future.[62] The figure of Polyxena, as she leaves from the left towards, presumably, her sacrifice on Achilles' tomb, looks back to another sacrifice on another altar: the anticipated death of aged Priam framed by two departing descendants.[63] The pot's exterior uses visual correspondences to underwrite the narrative imperative that all men must die.[64]

[60] *pace* Giuliani (2013: 185). This double appearance is unusual: Robertson (1992: 95). Suggesting that the painter has mistakenly named one child because he is next to Andromache: Arias (1962: 339).
[61] Both are also shown from the back: Rühfel (1984: 54). Compare *BAPD* 16776, 7390, 13363, 200097 and 203229 for other surviving cups (mostly fragmentary) featuring Astyanax. The Priam and Neoptolemus motif: Recke (2002: 41-50). Combinations of details and scenes: Hedreen (2001: esp. 64-90); Giuliani (2013: 171-72).
[62] See notes 59 and 60.
[63] Compare *BAPD* 202641, where Priam's death combines two perspectives: anticipation of his end in a climactic Harmodios blow and the lament with which survivors will remember his life (the raised arms of figures about him form a substitution for mourners at his *prothesis*). Hints of Kritios and Nesiotes' sculptural composition: Miller (1995: 453). The 'life history' of the victorious, but deceased, tyrannicides: Vout (2018: ch. 1).
[64] This epic motif: Sourvinou-Inwood (1981: 20).

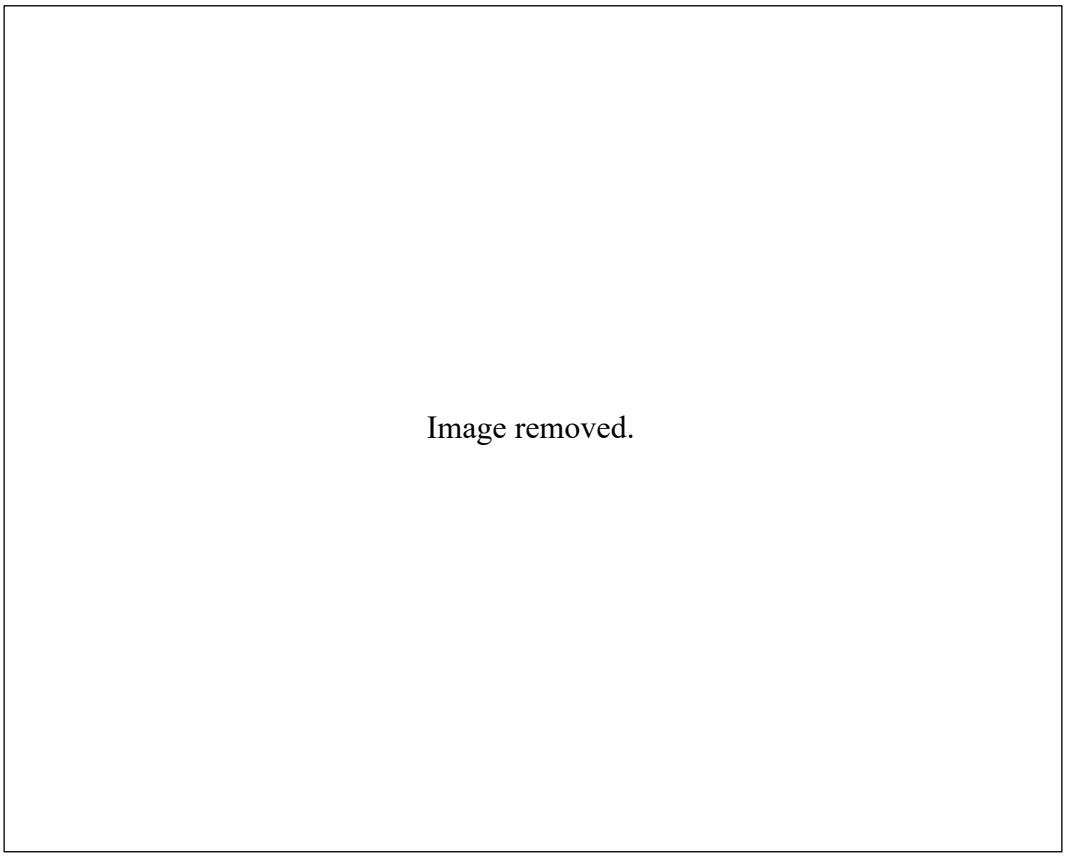


FIGURE 2.2C

Louvre cup (interior).

See caption to FIGURE 2.2A.

As a result, the composition within the tondo (FIGURE 2.2C) assumes a latent bitterness, imbued with the certainty of death to come that is visualised on the exterior. At first glance, the painter has depicted Briseis serving wine to Phoenix in or outside the tent of Achilles, whose armour is suspended above.[65] The old man sits, facing to the left and extending a cup. The young woman stands before him holding a jug. The image can stand as a memory, a prequel, a snapshot from the embassy to Achilles as told in *Iliad* 9.162-656 (though in the poem's version Briseis

[65] Briseis and Phoenix are named: see *AVI* 6490.

is not present to pour the wine, except insofar as her presence is promised by the speakers).[66] Though the embassy's mission to persuade Achilles to fight failed, the larger end it sought, the fall of Troy, was ultimately achieved, as the outside of the pot attests. The old man within demands, motivates and anticipates the death of the one without.

Yet, the seated figure of Phoenix with his white hair and beard (FIGURE 2.2C) also looks *backwards* to his wretched analogue, Priam, another old man stretching out his hand, not for wine, but life (FIGURE 2.2B). Another double, Phoenix too confronts mortality. Indeed, in the visual climax to a symposiast's drink, his venerable image is unveiled as the culmination of a mortal life. The direction of his gaze is unclear, but just might fall into the bowl of the painted cup he holds. His aged contemplation is a *mise en abyme* of the drinking subject who stares into another tondo, seeing either his reflection on the wine's surface or his painted image in counterpart.[67] Briseis, a Helen-like woman defined by successive separations (from Troy, from Achilles), throws his age, his inexorable death, into sharper relief by presenting him with the fulfilments denied him: a failure to win a girl and an argument.[68] Though she is draped, the painter has shown her body's outline, her breasts and buttocks, beneath the fabric. Perhaps she, like Anacreon's girl with the

[66] Robertson (1992: 95) also notes that the tondo scene forms a prologue.
[67] Compare the interiors of *BAPD* 203905, 203907, 203912 (in this final one, figures present two reflective surfaces: wine and shield). Unusual and interesting is 217212 which features a symposium involving Hades and Persephone in the tondo, a ghostly reflection of the drinking subject's environment. Frontality, painted drinkers and reflexivity: Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 97-99).
[68] Indeed, this scene takes on still more poignancy against the backdrop of Phoenix's words to Achilles in *Il.* 9.444-57: as a young man he slept with his father's concubine so that his old father would be hateful to her; his father then cursed him with childlessness. Other possible Briseis and Phoenix combinations: 203903, 204400. Desirable women denied: 204395. Old men excluded (perhaps): 204401 (outside a door); 209980 (tondo: old man; exterior: Dionysian revelry). Old age tears lovers apart: 217030 (Eos and Tithonus).

embroidered sandals, 'gapes after' another, repelled by his white hair…[69] The explicit association on the Getty cup between the world of myth and the real world of Athens is here drawn through the handling of the pot and the conceptual link between drinking subject and object. From contemplation of age to the frightening prospect of death is not so far a leap; the drinker that gazes into the dregs of his cup and hears another singing of graceful youth departed might well respond in his own verse with tearful dread of Tartarus.[70]

Forms of Thought

Let us return to the tondo of the Getty cup (Figure 2.1a). Actual and possible layerings divide the pot's single surface into multiple imaginable surfaces of different depths and in different spatial relationships to one another. The association between surface and substance is something that painted pottery explores with especial point because it shares in both visual properties, a three-dimensional body and a two-dimensional canvas, in a manner unlike other three-dimensional or two-dimensional art such as freestanding and relief sculpture or wall-paintings.[71] This is still more interesting in red-figure painting, where vacillation between image and

[69] Anac. 358 *PMG*. Drinking, singing and meditating upon age and mortality were familiar themes at the symposium. Old men feature on cups, such as *BAPD* 5361 (Pelias), though not so frequently as youths: note 92. Implied visual parallels between age and departing for war (two imminent departures in death): 204336, 211334, 217284, 211641. Meditation on age is also prevalent in early classical art: Holloway (1973: 100-1).

[70] Anac. 395 *PMG*. Death and old age in Greek poetry: Budelmann (2018a: 199-200). Art, death and terror management: Spivey (2005: ch. 8). On how images of the fallen in the symposium 'worked upon the viewer to internalize and accept death': Arrington (2010: 124). Consider *BAPD* 203416 (tondo: old man singing to his lyre) and 211184 (old man facing a woman holding a wreath).

[71] Perhaps the nearest point of reference is the sculpted sarcophagus or the box of Kypselos. On a larger scale, a temple's sculptural work might construct a similar interplay.

background is built into the technique: figures are reserved background and background is added in paint.[72]

Here, the veil talks to other surfaces that denote substance or its opposite and reveal interest in the human figure as a drawing and a person. Consider Ajax's nudity. The bare skin that covers his body's substance echoes the bodiless pelt beneath him, another corpse reduced to its surface. Moreover, though his rigid body is differentiated from the fabric that appears to fall into soft crescents above him, the triangular point of his right elbow and the gentle curve of his left arm and buttocks reiterate the edges and folds of the veil that will cover him. The same lines and shapes represent objects of different ontology and disrupt their distinction, even their presence. There is a coincidence of three-dimensional presence of dead body upon ground beneath veil, and its absence: a reduction of similar-looking lines, edges, surfaces and skins. Interest in representation and decoration fits within a trend in pottery from the late Archaic period onwards.[73] But it also hints at artistic triumph in the face of death: insofar as lines and paint show depth, they represent a material corpse that will decay;[74] insofar as black perimeters surround blank space, they visualise an ex-person, an empty shell, a non-appearance.

Expressive manoeuvring of borders and space elsewhere on the pot corroborates this. At the bottom of the scene the red mass of the corpse's right arm and the red expanse of the sheepskin ground area trace the curvature of the inner red clay circle leaving a narrow gap of black paint. The effect is a lack of depth, where

[72] This may be connected to interest in fragmentation of the picture field in the late Archaic period (Neer (2002)), which coincides with the advent of the red-figure technique.
[73] See note 72 on Neer (2002).
[74] Though this triumph of paint and line can only imply and not enact decay.

'background' 'figure' and 'line' move backwards and forwards in a *trompe-l'œil* like Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit.[75] An edge that is natural for an arm is strange for a base, or a pelt, which is neither hidden by the red perimeter nor flows beyond it, but, rather, performs as frame *and* framed in its faithful tracing of the circular interior of the ornamental border.

Less faithful are the feet of the dead, which break through, or over, the inner red circle and the meandering border beyond.[76] The shift in visual category is confusing. The unusual lower edge of the woolly ground suggests this embellished circle was never a window frame. But what was otherwise a border, a decorated edge to the black canvas of the central tondo, is suddenly given substance. The artifice of the repeating motif shifts from back to foreground, taking on existential significance in the context of the scene.[77] Switching from within to over, the corpse appears to shift dimensions and float out into the black unseen of the painted perimeter. There is a similar optical glitch at the corpse's head. The circular border alternates three running meanders with a starburst square. But here there are four: the additional meander—a deliberate miscalculation?[78]—stretches the perimeter thin, the miniature labyrinths of its geometric motifs yawning wider before the rolling eyes of the corpse.[79] Transformation of visual space at the border visualises ontological transformation, a transition out of life and out of the image. Indeed, if, as Nikolaus Dietrich's study of space in Greek painting suggests, the relevant

[75] Duck-rabbits: Wittgenstein (1953: 193-229, esp. 194 (II.xi)); Gombrich (1968: esp. 4-5). See further note 32 on page 20.
[76] Figures, frames and their scholarship: Squire (2018a: 7-8, esp. n. 17). Against special significance: Boardman (2001: 186).
[77] Metaphorical (and existential) significance to breaking the frame: Marconi (2017: 139-43). See also Hurwit (1977: 9-14) for the 'interrupted frame' as an 'open mode'.
[78] Observing another ornamental miscalculation: Squire (2018a: 7). Compare *BAPD* 205176, where Skiron's foot pierces excess meanders.
[79] The composition appears similar at the feet: a stretch of six adjacent meanders.

location of these figures was never 'outside' or 'the natural environment' (or even 'backstage') but rather their material support (the pot), it is not just the ground-line that would 'implode' on Ajax's disappearance, but the whole pictorial environment.[80] With these hints of structural, spatial dissolution, Ajax's pictorial relationship with and rupture of his environment instantiates the loss of *aisthesis* that accompanies his body's death and, in turn, dissolves the material world in darkness.[81]

This ontological overlap of image and substance runs deeper: the feet that pierce the tondo's frame imitate the sword that transfixes the corpse, transposing two bodies, two vessels. The pot's perforated body acquires a cadaverous corporality, its interior laid bare in a shedding of blood-red wine, its lifeless shell carried in the subject's hands like the bodies of Sarpedon or Memnon.[82]

[80] See Dietrich (2010: 550-53). The association of pictorial space with the spatial qualities of different media (and different material supports): Dietrich (2017: esp. paras. 15-21).
[81] For a similar idea, see Osborne (1988: 4).
[82] On the association between pots, bodies and death, see pages 79-80.

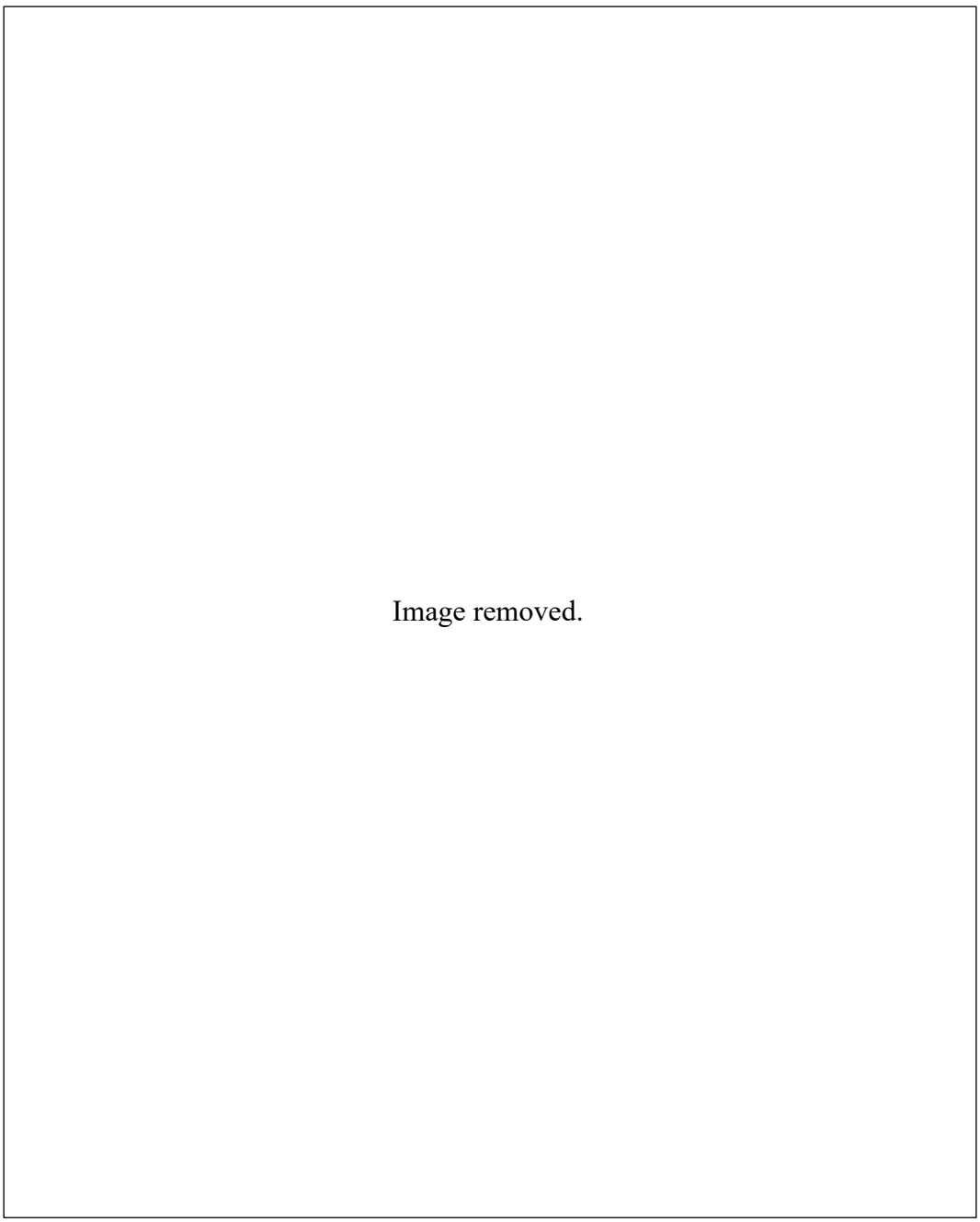


FIGURE 2.3A

pelike (Eos and Memnon).

Attic red-figure *pelike*, attributed to the Syleus Painter. 500-450 BCE.

Found in Italy (Chiusi).

Musée du Louvre, Paris: G232.

Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.

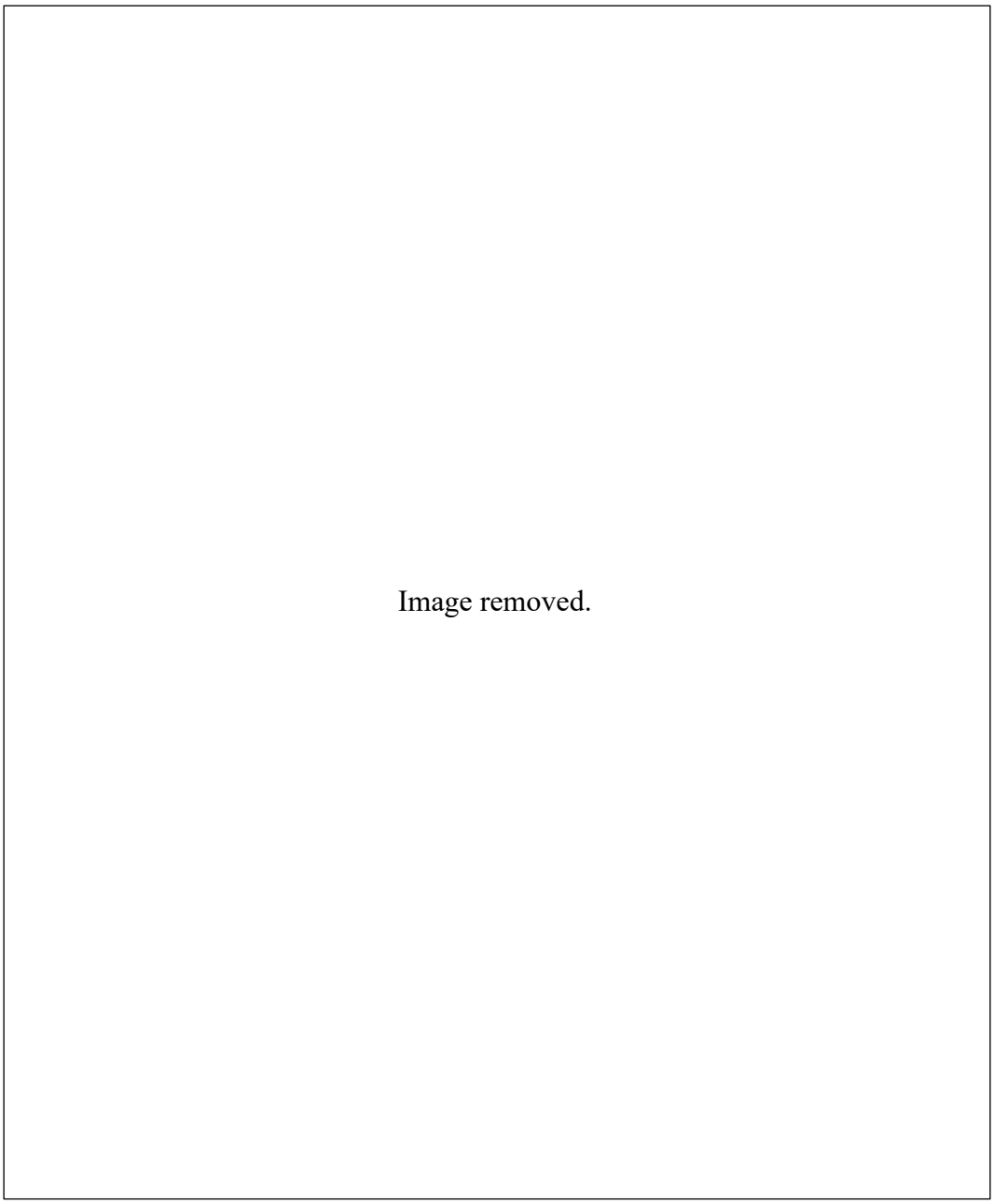


FIGURE 2.3B

pelike (Athenian figures).

See caption to FIGURE 2.3A.

We see a similar implicit link on a red-figure Athenian *pelike* (FIGURES 2.3A-B):[83] on one side, Eos carries Memnon; on the other, a male Athenian citizen extends his arms towards a female figure struggling beneath the weight of a *hydria*. The reversal connects terracotta vessel and lifeless body, a relationship that would be enhanced if the *pelike* were viewed in a funerary context (a possibility, given its Italian provenance).[84] Just so, in the case of the Getty cup, pot-turned-body disinters visually and materially the existential transformation effected by penetration of the person's frame, another body turned hollow vessel (in mirror image to the emptied sheath above).

'Nonsensical' inscriptions seem to respond to this visual strangeness, intimating death's mystery in meaningless lines of no representational significance except insofar as they lack import.[85] On the Getty cup, for example: γνοισνον. Like so many ciphers (untranslatable sounds such as αἰαῖ, ἒ ἔ; painted black miniatures of pots and souls) non-words can express the ineffable.[86] Indeed, the failure of inscriptions to operate as labels articulates a loss of identity, akin to the conceptual interchangeability of Achilles and Ajax, or the visual substitutability of Priam and Phoenix,[87] where inscriptional differentiation of repeated figure types accentuates

[83] *BAPD* 202501; Beazley (1925: 161.11); *ARV*[2] 250.24; *Add*[2] 203. We attach the name *pelike* to a pot with handles and a sagging belly. *pelikai* probably held liquids.
[84] Attic ware found in Italy was often found in a grave: note 12. This has implications for the experience of a mourner carrying the *pelike*. See further note 104. Suggesting that the pot contains Memnon's ashes: *CVA* Paris 6, France 9: 36, pl. 47.1-5 (E. Pottier).
[85] But see Mannack (2014) on *kalos* inscriptions: inscriptions on exported pots may suggest that inscriptions were aesthetically pleasing regardless of sense. The polyvalent significance of 'nonsense' inscriptions: Chiarini (2018).
[86] See pages 132-33. *lekythoi* (when painted on *lekythoi*) and *eidola* are often rendered as painted black miniatures. *lekythoi* examples: *BAPD* 216332, 216329, 216331, 216332, 216333. *eidola* examples: 209341, 1140, 305529. *eidola* as 'marking a place where direct contact with the dead can be made': Oakley (2004: 213). *eidola* on *lekythoi*: Pottier (1883: 75-79); Jones (2015: 825-26). The virtues of silence (being 'struck dumb' by the image) in the funerary sphere: Vout (2014: esp. 288-89).
[87] Or Astyanax and Troilus—on this borrowing: Henle (1973: 147-48).

loss of identity in death. It is notable, in this respect, that Astyanax's dangling double on the Louvre cup goes unnamed, unlike his escaping twin (FIGURES 2.2A-B).[88]

But forget sex, religion and politics,[89] was death welcome at a party?[90] Not always, according to Anacreon, who prefers topics of art, love and merriment to talk of 'quarrels and tearful war' at a symposium.[91] Anacreon's domain is a place for love and wine.[92] But even if thoughts of death were unpleasant, they were far from absent: death is pervasive on sympotic ware, enshrouding and buried within themes of desire, delight and drink.[93] Indeed, reflections on death might have sprung from associations and interrelations between a drinking cup and other elements of the symposium. Consider how Anacreon sang of Cleobulus,[94] for some such song might have infused the sensuous synchronicity of seeing a pot such as the Getty cup's image and tasting its wine. Gazing and drinking operate as a material foil to an imaginative engagement with death. And this metaphor-like impact of the artefact mirrors the power of the mythological interface that prompts and filters real existential contemplation, whether the drinking subject be distant from the dead in a symposium or near them in a visit to the grave. The subject of Anacreon's poem

[88] Inscriptions and 'decoding': Squire (2018a: esp. 12). The ontological game escalates when inscribed names signify figures' actions and identities. Andromache's name: Giuliani (2013).
[89] These are plentiful in sympotic images and song.
[90] The polarity of death and the symposium: Murray (1988).
[91] Anac. *fr. eleg*. 2 West.
[92] On this view of Anacreon and intimations of something deeper: Budelmann (2009). Compare other cups attributed to the Brygos Painter that feature this sort of pleasant merriment: *BAPD* 203923, 203926. By other painters: 204623, 205046, 205096, 205099, 205103, 205186.
[93] Even focusing on tondos, subjects are numerous. Though death seems less popular (at least in the fifth century) than, for example, symposium and athletics scenes, there are a reasonable number of deaths. See, for example: *BAPD* 203224 (Achilles kills Troilus); 205060, 217201 (Amazonomachy); 204442 (death of Orpheus); 204546, 220533 (Poseidon kills a giant); 203838, 205108, 204549 (fight with Persians/archers); 201755, 204507 (Theseus and the Minotaur); as well as deaths implied by subjects such as warrior departures, a popular tondo image (note 69).
[94] Anac. 359 *PMG*.

loves, is mad for, gazes on Cleobulus. But is Cleobulus in the room, on the vase, or in the mind? Does Ajax in all the displayed beauty of his painted body, in the lunacy of confused visual categories (image and substance, warriors and sheep), recall Cleobulus or Cleobulus recall Ajax? And which Cleobulus, which Ajax?[95] For—[96]

> Stopped in the tumult Cleobulus lies,
> Beneath Oïleus' arm, a living prize ...

At the intersection between mythology, humanity, song and image, transposability of identity offers one way into reflection upon its loss.

LEKYTHOI

Let us turn to a different corpus of pots that blossoms in popularity and inventiveness in the fifth century: white-ground *lekythoi.* As above, I first consider how these pots explore the visibility of death, before delving deeper into the ways in which they implicate viewers in existential and epistemological meditations.

PROXIMITY TO DEATH

I open with an Athenian white-ground *lekythos* held in the New York Metropolitan Museum (FIGURES 2.4A-C).[97]

[95] There is another Cleobulus in Hom. *Il.* 16.330-34, victim of another Ajax (son of Oileus).
[96] Translation by Alexander Pope: Pope (1909: 301).
[97] *BAPD* 216333; *ARV*[2] 1227.5; *Add*[2] 350; *Para* 466.5.



FIGURE 2.4A

Met *lekythos* (left view).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Bosanquet Painter. 440-430 BCE.

Height 38.7cm.

Metropolitan Museum, New York: 23.160.38.

Photo: Met Open Access.



FIGURE 2.4B

Met *lekythos* (centre view).

See caption for FIGURE 2.4A.



FIGURE 2.4C

Met *lekythos* (right view).

See caption for FIGURE 2.4A.

As on many *lekythoi*, two figures frame a central funerary monument.[98] On the left stands a young man displaying his nude physique in a frontal pose but with his head turned in profile to the right, looking towards the monument. A cloak and *aryballos* hang from his left arm, and he holds a spear that echoes the vertical lines of the stele with its shaft. Facing him on the opposite side of the monument is a woman, again in a frontal pose and turning her head in profile to the left. She wears a peplos and carries an *alabastron* and a basket with funerary offerings. The tall rectangular face of the stele, honoured at the top with a tied fillet, is mounted upon a three-stepped base on which five *lekythoi*, one squat *lekythos* and a *kylix*, each painted in black, have been deposited. Around the upper edge of the pot's body circle two black lines within which are painted a band of running meanders (broken and stopt).[99]

The central stele is a site of death. It is also the focal point for the figures' attention, and the two profile gazes in turn direct an external viewer's eyes onto the monument.[100] In an obvious sense, the visual impact of death upon internal and external viewers alike is immediate: bare bodies and stone arrest with naked frontality. As Euripides' Clytemnestra claims, death and the grave are conceptually intertwined (τί δὲ τὸ θνήσκειν οὐ τάφος νομίζεται;).[101] To some extent, then, viewers (both real and painted) that look at the stele encounter death directly. Moreover, in looking at the overall scene, real viewers perform a face-to-face encounter with the *lekythos* akin to the confrontation between the painted faces of

[98] Compare: *BAPD* 213986; 648, 1140, 1921, 1924, 2327, 3378, 7199, 10342, 11521, 11732.
[99] The shoulder decoration does not survive, but see Kurtz (1975: 37-38, figs. 14, 15) on *lekythoi* of the Bosanquet Painter. On the meanders: Kurtz (1975: fig. 4).
[100] On the single point of view offered by *lekythoi* (and elimination of the vessel's circularity): Baldassare (1988: 110).
[101] Eur. *IA* 1443 (though Diggle obelises).

the figures and the painted stele. This reinforces the sense in which this image does not just involve looking at objects that mark death (the real pot, the painted monument, and the painted pots upon it), but is about the act of looking at such objects and the connections that are forged. Indeed, meditation on the person-object relationships and the pot-monument parallel is sharpened by other sensory parallels between external and internal viewers.[102] In the scene, as in daily life, getting close to the dead involves handling objects: both painted figures and real mourners clasp pots.[103] Touch, as well as sight, and perhaps implicitly the other senses (if a real viewer were to hold this pot while standing beside a grave in the Kerameikos), unite external and internal viewers in a material encounter with death that is defined by presence and immediacy.[104]

The profile gazes also contribute to the impression that this *lekythos* is a site of encounter. Turned inwards onto the monument and towards one another, these invite self-projection by real viewers into the eyes, minds and memories of the painted figures. What might these figures see? A simple answer is that they see the monument and perhaps each other. But the stele also invites a more imaginative response to it by presenting itself as a third body. Crowned with a fillet, it imitates the upright bodies of the figures that stand alongside it and is of roughly comparable height. But unlike archaic stelai on which upright figures were visibly carved in

[102] Consider examples where the monument on the pot *is* a *lekythos*, as in *BAPD* 9024582 (image: Oakley (2004: 201, fig. 164)), and examples towards the end of the fifth century where the *lekythos* becomes a stone monument (such as Clairmont (1993) nos. 4.120, 4.150, 4.180, 4.190, 4.218, 4.421, 4.671, 4.680, 4.690, 4.710). See also examples where inscriptions on the *lekythos* background recall inscriptions on the monuments painted upon them (for example *BAPD* 209270): there is a conceptual interchangeability between *lekythos* and tomb. Immerwahr (1990: 100 and n. 9) and the entry by Christina Avronidaki in Oikonomou (2014: 119) cite an unpublished *lekythos* inscribed with a funerary epigram. On inscriptions on *lekythoi*: Lissarrague (1988).
[103] Compare: *BAPD* 2755, 209247, 216337 (bringing pots); 209272, 212350, 217819 (pots on tomb).
[104] Tactility, mourning and remembrance: Arrington (2018). Physicality of experiencing death: Turner (2016: 154).

relief (a visual memory that images of monuments on *lekythoi* such as these might have unearthed), the unmarked space framed by the monument's outline is evocative of a deceased that is absent and invisible.[105] The stone face presents an empty visage that mimics the blank, ungiving stare of a corpse.[106] Does this, perhaps, reflect an imaginative encounter with the deceased that is provoked by the monument? And what about the figures themselves? Each figure looks not just upon the monument but also through it and onto each other: they become, through the prism of the monument, the object of each other's gaze. In this respect, each painted figure on this *lekythos* might be a life-sized *eidolon*, or might be a mourner, and the ambiguity is essential. This is not to say that they see a ghost in a literal sense,[107] but that each painted figure might join the stele in suggesting an encounter with the deceased at the grave. When external viewers not only imagine all these possibilities, but also the possibility that the painted figures imagine them, the correspondences between internal and external viewers deepen.

The monument, then, sets the deceased *qua* deceased at the centre of the image.[108] But it also raises more assertively the epistemological problem of encountering death through observation of the material world. Where the drinking cup danced between revelation and concealment of Ajax's body (sheer visibility), the

[105] Some examples of archaic stelai from Attica with relief figures: Boardman (1985: figs. 224, 230-37). Compare the frontality of free-standing *kouroi* such as the Anavyssos *kouros*.
[106] See chapter one: ὃς τὰ ὄμματα ἔστησεν (*Phaedo* 118a13). Indeed, Kardara (1960: 157-58) observed that figures rarely interact on later *lekythoi* (painted after 430 BCE).
[107] Identification of the dead on *lekythoi* is notoriously, and appropriately, difficult. On this difficulty: Bažant (1986), arguing for deliberate ambiguity; Oakley (1997a: 66-70), (2004: 213-14); Kurtz and Boardman (1971: 104-5). On misguided attempts to identify the dead on stelai: Bergemann (1997: 55-56, 67). Some early attempts to see the dead on *lekythoi*: Curtius (1895: 88) (following others); Riezler (1914: 23-33). More recently: Shapiro (1991: 652-53); Reeder (1995: 146-48); Schmidt (2005: 63-67); Arrington (2015: 254-56), acknowledging ambiguity; Allen (2018).
[108] The stele as point of contact between the living and dead: Baldassare (1988); D'Onofrio (1988); Lissarrague (2001: 120); De Cesare (1997: 192).

monument is a visual reminder of the invisibility of the real corpse.[109] It self-consciously re-presents (as well as presents) the deceased.[110] When looking at the tondo of the Getty cup, viewers might imagine that Tecmessa sees the deceased beneath the shroud. By contrast, when looking at the images on this *lekythos*, viewers might imagine not just that the painted figures *see* the deceased, but also that they *remember* the deceased, an imaginative encounter that might be as emotionally and sensorily intense as a real one, but that is qualified with awareness of the distance that characterises its status as memory.[111] This *lekythos* invites viewers to imagine not just what is seen (and so represented, at least in part, in paint) but what is imagined. The two-fold invitation is reinforced by the pot's brusque combination of frontal and profile views: the poses adopted by the figures seem somewhat unnatural (fully frontal bodies, even the feet, with fully profile heads). Where frontal views of the bodies of the monument and the figures offer external viewers and handlers a direct visual connection to match the sensory immediacy of handling the real pot, the figures' gazes, turned to the side, echo the mourner's gaze, turned away from a real corpse or grave and towards the pot and its images.[112] Pulling external gazes towards them and so into profile (vis-à-vis a

[109] On the participation of *lekythoi* in a discourse on the possibilities of making the dead visually present, see Arrington (2015: 253-67). Much work has been done on the link between visual experience of Roman sarcophagi and experience of death: see note 57 on page 33.

[110] On the coincidence of two representational systems (archaic/presentational and classical/representational) on *lekythoi*, see Jones (2015). See further note 133. On presentation, see Schnapp (1988: 571) on *kolossoi*, citing Emile Benveniste: 'Through a fiction made out of wood or clay, the presence of the dead man is prolonged beyond the grave. The communion with the living of which he has deprived his bodily being, is thus perpetuated thanks to his image.' See note 56 on page 32; Vernant (1990). Conversely, on the image of the dead as an 'appearance […] not even skin-deep' (discussing Republican ancestral masks): Turner (2016: 149). Compare the exceptional preservation offered Homeric heroes whose *kalos thanatos* wins 'imperishable glory': Vernant (1991a). See further Bryson (1983: esp. xii) on the image as sign (rather than Gombrich's 'record of a perception'). On the grave monument as a *sema* in Homeric and archaic Greece, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1995: ch. 3).

[111] See further Jones (2015: 832-34) on images on *lekythoi* as Aristotelian memory-images, or *phantasmata*.

[112] (Non-)existence of monuments in the fifth century: note 167.

real deceased, or grave), the pot and the monument operate as prisms that invite viewers to look at death sideways.

The inclusion of a painted monument upon the surface of *lekythoi* is also epistemologically provocative because it reminds viewers that, unlike a sarcophagus, the *lekythos* (in this case 38.7cm tall)[113] neither contains nor mimics the absent dead body.[114] As mentioned above (pages 79-80), the relationship between pots and human bodies has a long history. This throws their undeniable difference into sharper relief: even urns, containers for bodies or ashes, are inadequate substitutes; like a memory, their simultaneous association with and distance from the human form is bittersweet. Consider how, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, urns and ashes of the war dead are a mockery of the men that died.[115] Or how Sophocles' Electra, holding an urn, the memorial of her brother, reflects that Orestes is nothing, a 'little substance in a little urn'.[116] But a *lekythos* is not an urn; it does not and could not contain ashes, let alone a corpse, within its miniature cavity.[117] A painted monument upon a *lekythos* thus marks a corpse that is not just invisible by virtue of being implicitly buried in the earth, but is in fact not there at all.[118] Indeed, one *lekythos* in the British Museum makes this tension between visibility and invisibility the object of explicit attention by depicting the body of a youth in a tomb.[119] While decorated pillow, shroud and horizontal corpse recall the

[113] A fairly average height for fifth-century terracotta *lekythoi*. Later in the century some become stone monuments: note 102.
[114] Compare Elsner (2012a: 179-80) on sarcophagi, reflexivity and mimesis of the body.
[115] Aesch. *Ag.* 433-44.
[116] Soph. *El.* 1129, 1142. The effect is compounded by irony: the urn does not contain Orestes' ashes.
[117] In fact, false bottoms in *lekythoi* sometimes render the suggested interior also absent.
[118] Compare Hardie (2002: 84-91) on cenotaphs and the absent-presence of the dead in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
[119] *BAPD* 209344; *ARV*^{2} 756.66; *Add*^{2} 285. Compare: 16860.

prothesis,[120] the box that surrounds the body upon a stepped base and the fillets that hang upon it evoke the tomb. Tapping into two iconographical traditions, the pot turns both on their head: the monument reveals what is usually hidden; the *prothesis*, scene of display and spectacle, is bereft of spectators.[121]

Instances where *lekythoi* painters rework the iconographical tradition of the 'dead on display' have a similar impact.[122] On a *lekythos* in the British Museum, for example, the winged figures of Hypnos and Thanatos hold the body of a warrior in front of a stele (FIGURES 2.5A-B).[123] The image brings into view the corpse that the monument usually conceals, setting up an overt dialogue between revelation and concealment. By re-contextualising the motif of the divine removal of Sarpedon (and his variant Memnon) in a scene where the natural interpretation is that the corpse *arrives* at its final resting place,[124] a mythological counterpart to the *ekphora*,[125] the image toys with possibilities of disappearance, whether by flight or burial. As Alcestis' child cries as he looks upon her body, 'My mother has gone below, she is no more…'[126] Visibly present bodies, images and tombs testify to absence.

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[120] Two more traditional depictions of the *prothesis* on *lekythoi*: *BAPD* 14151 and 212338.
[121] On the ambiguity as to whether this shows a *prothesis* or the corpse in the grave, see *CVA* Tübingen 5, Germany 54: 61, pl. 27.1) (J. Burow). See further Carboni (2007: 28-29) on the peculiarity of this scene.
[122] A catalogue and discussion of *prothesis* and Hypnos and Thanatos scenes on *lekythoi*: Oakley (2004: 76-87, 125-37). See further Mintsi (1997), especially on transformation from an epic to daily-life scene.
[123] *BAPD* 212420; *ARV*[2] 851.272. Compare: 216353. Mintsi (1997: 48-49) identifies fourteen *lekythoi* with this subject. These images as representing a beautiful death with beautiful burial: Sourvinou-Inwood (1987: 147). Hypnos and Thanatos on pots and in tragedy and a social discourse on female glory: Giudice (2003). Reuse of Euphronios' 'stock' motif on fifth-century *lekythoi*: Spivey (2018: 157-59).
[124] Hypnos and Thanatos' bent legs indicate that they are depositing the corpse: Giudice (2015: 36). Emphasising arrival not departure here, and arguing that the presence of Hypnos and Thanatos testifies to a 'beautiful death', free from the usual negative connotations of the corpse: Bérard (1988: 167-68).
[125] For the argument that these are mythical figures not mythological scenes: Schmidt (2005: 58).
[126] Eur. *Alc.* 393-94. See further Eur. *IA* 1464.

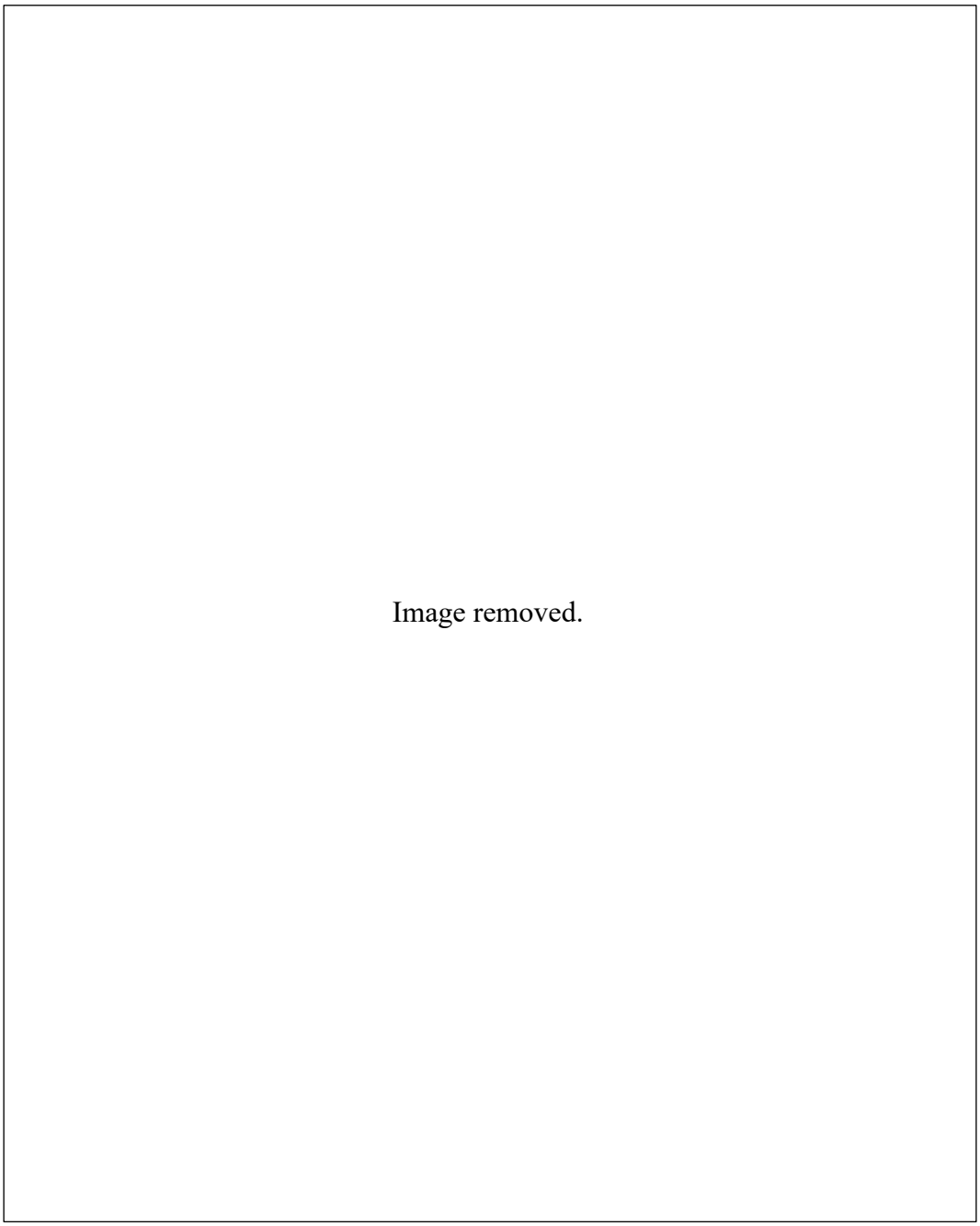


FIGURE 2.5A

Lekythos (Hypnos and Thanatos at the grave).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Sabouroff Painter. 470-440 BCE.

Height 35.6cm, Diameter 11.5cm.

British Museum, London: D59 / 1884,0223.2.

Image: British Museum.

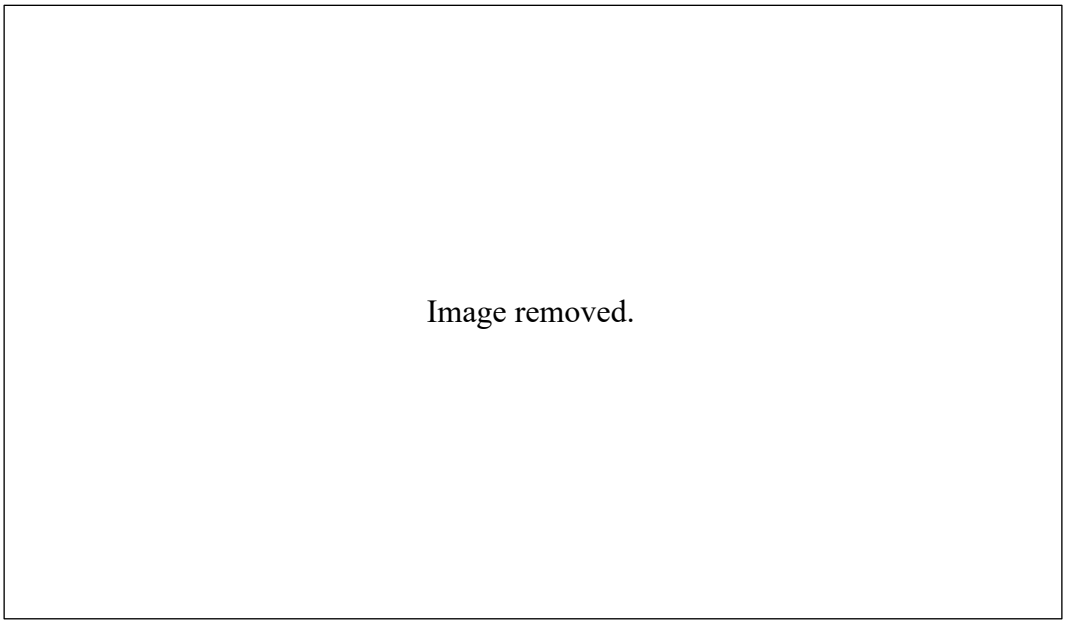


FIGURE 2.5B

Lekythos detail (Hypnos and Thanatos at the grave).

See caption for FIGURE 2.5A.

Images featuring Charon in the presence of the tomb, such as an example in the Louvre (FIGURES 2.6A-B),[127] have a similar effect.[128] Though the dead are, to some extent, more visible, more present on these *lekythoi* in that their identity as dead is rendered less ambiguous by the presence of these divinities, the mythological register is important.

[127] *BAPD* 217819; *ARV*[2] 1384.18; *Add*[2] 372. According to the *BAPD*, at least 77 *lekythoi* combine a funerary subject with Charon. Though it is ambiguous whether the female figure is alive or dead: Oakley (2004: 120).

[128] Interpretations of the Charon figure: Sourvinou-Inwood (1987: 155-58) on his ambivalence for marginal figures as reassuring (as mythological ferryman) and frightening (as metaphor for death); Díez de Velasco (1988) on his popular origin, (1995: 56-57, 61-62) on him symbolising a more democratic and optimistic form of facing death; Sourvinou-Inwood (1995: 328) on his scenes as 'images of the deceased's own experience in the other world, of the death of the self from the viewpoint of its surviving part'; Oakley (2004: 125) on how, in classical Greek literature, 'the image of "Charon waiting" indicates approaching death'; Giudice (2015: esp. 267) on the appearance of Charon on *lekythoi* and the need for emotional reassurance in a time of political and social turmoil; Walter-Karydi (2015: 143) on the image of Charon and interest in the existential boundary between life and death.

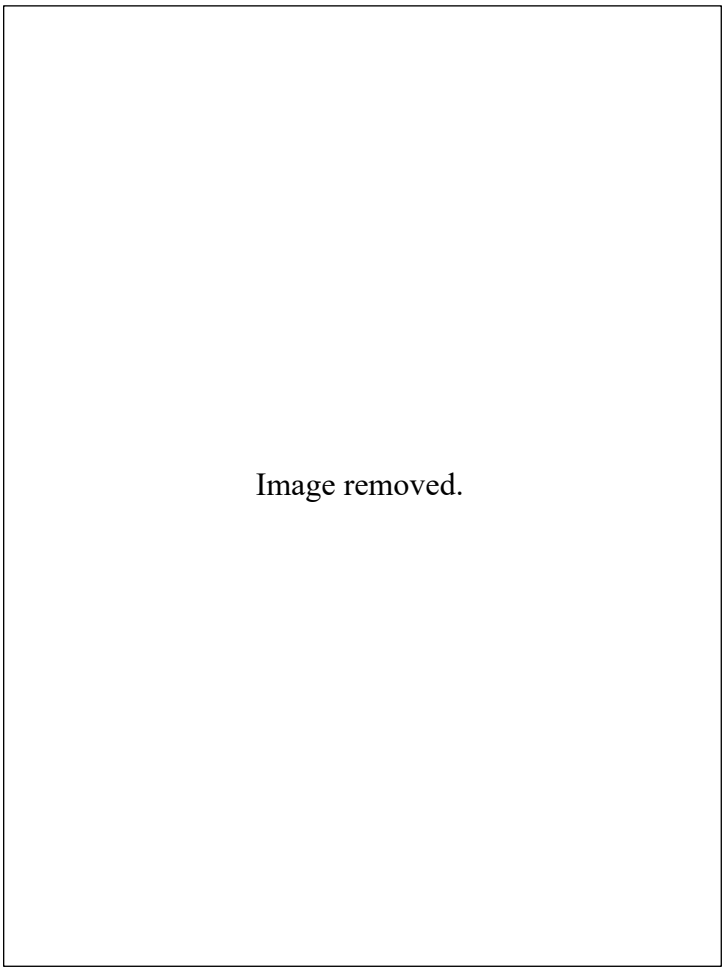


FIGURE 2.6A

Lekythos (Charon at the grave).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to Group R. 420-410 BCE.

Height 38.8cm, Diameter 13.5cm.

Found in Greece (Eretria, Euboea).

Musée du Louvre, Paris: CA537.

Photo: Musée du Louvre.

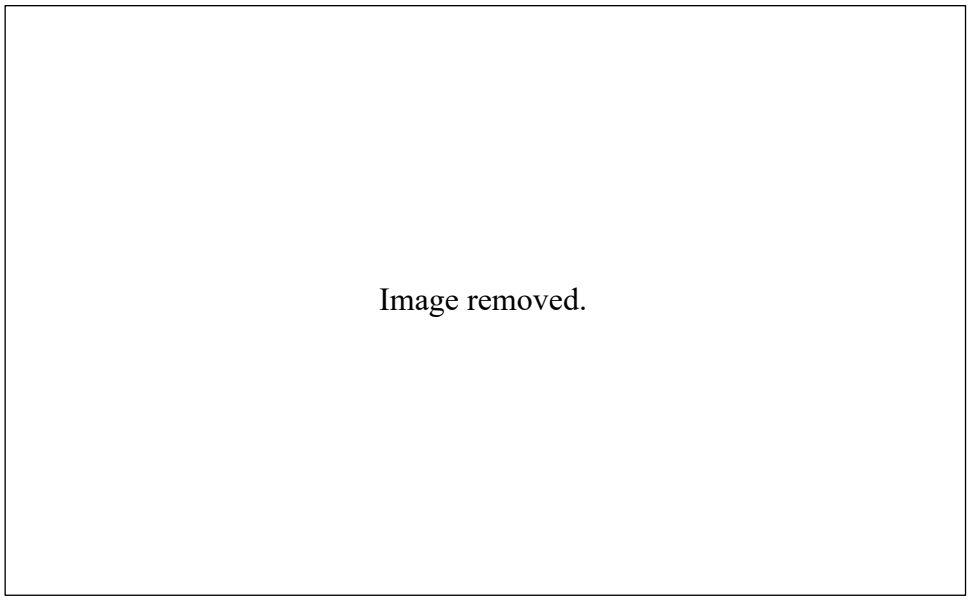


FIGURE 2.6B

Lekythos detail (Charon at the grave).

See caption for FIGURE 2.6A.

I will not delve here into the intricacies of what various Athenians might have believed actually happened when they died and who they might meet (though it is precisely these *lekythoi*, and especially the images of Charon, that have been formative in accounts of changing Athenian attitudes to death).[129] I will instead extract one way in which at least some of these examples appear to draw not just on a mythological register but on a specifically artistic tradition to make an epistemological point.

[129] See especially Sourvinou-Inwood (1987), (1995: 301-61).

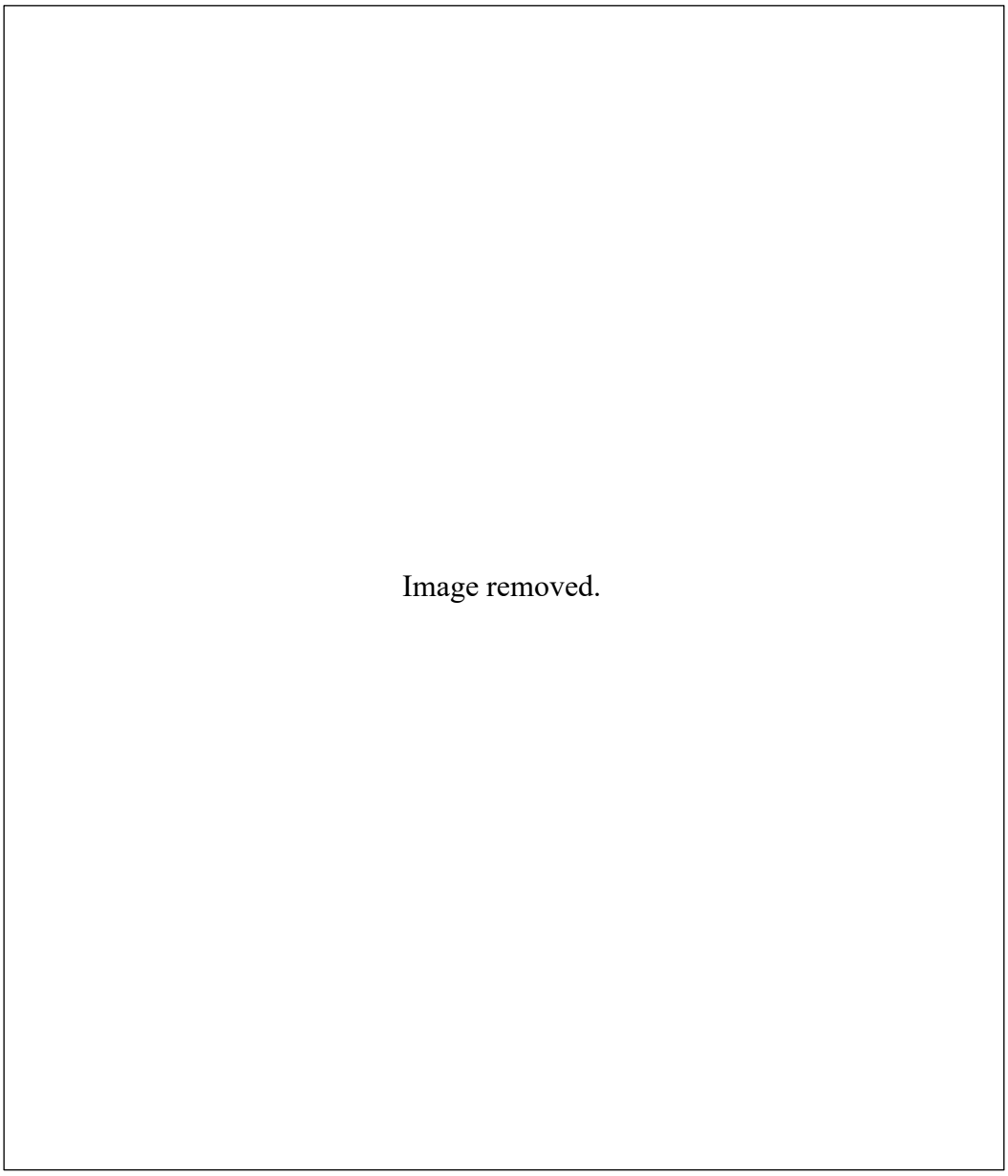


FIGURE 2.7A

Lekythos fragment (Hypnos and Thanatos finial).

Attic white-ground *lekythos* fragment. 430-420 BCE. Height (estimated) 70-80cm, Diameter (reconstructed) 19.7cm.

Antikensammlung, Berlin: 3352.

Photo: *CVA* Berlin 8, pl. 24.1.

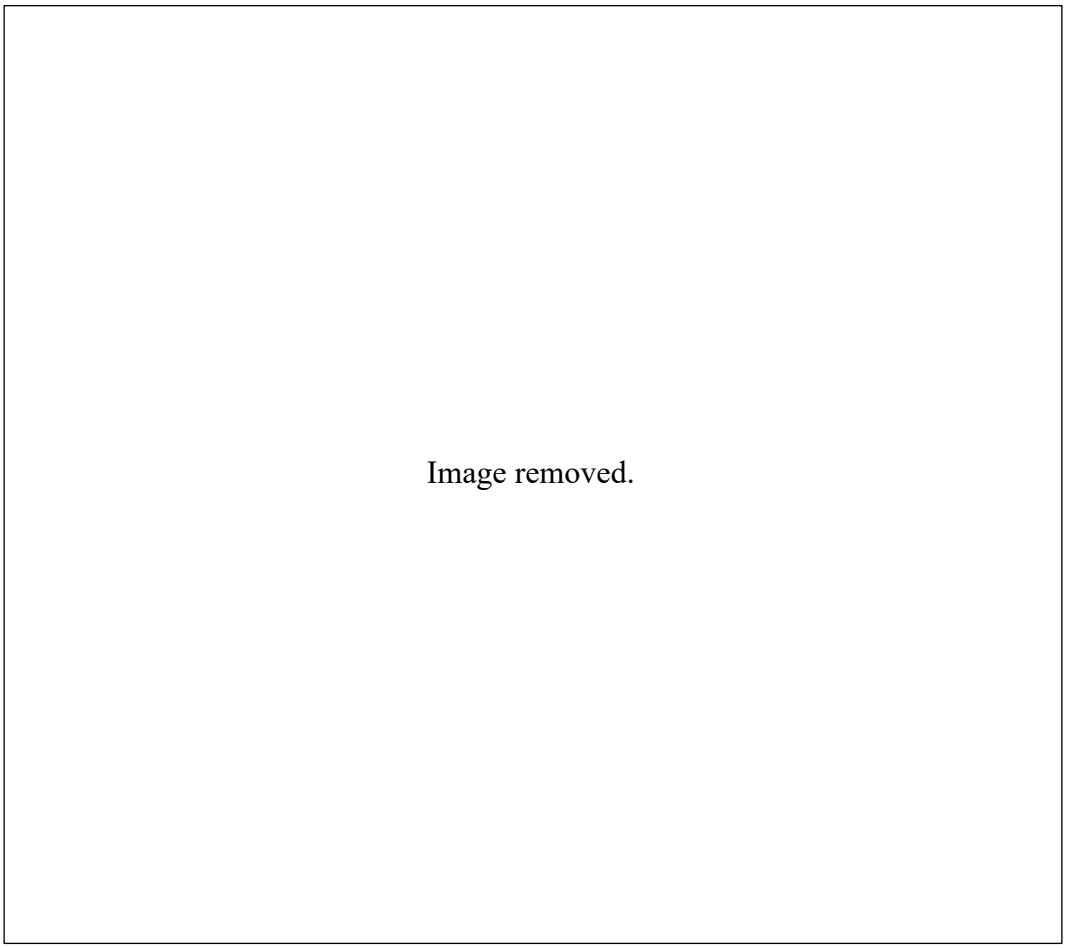


FIGURE 2.7B

Drawing showing detail from *lekythos* fragment (Hypnos and Thanatos finial).

See caption for FIGURE 2.7A.

Photo: *CVA* Berlin 8, 38, fig. 4.

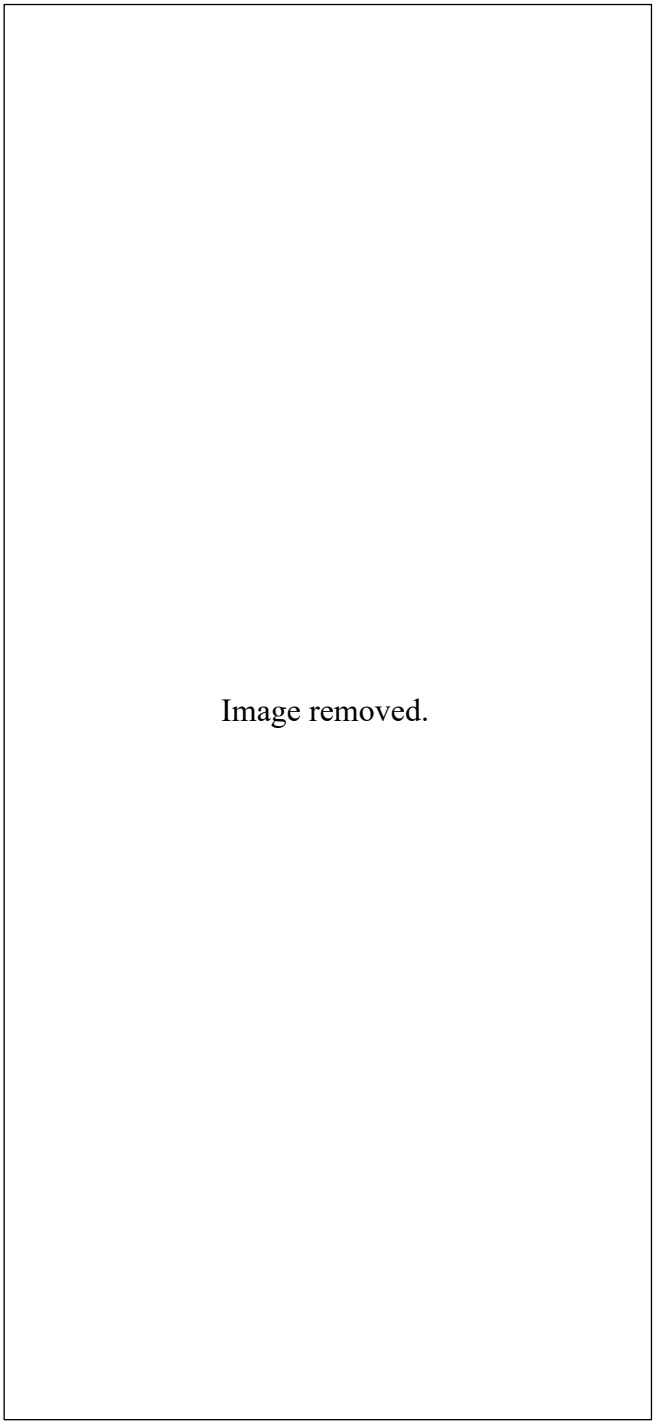


FIGURE 2.8

Lekythos (with Hypnos and Thanatos hydria).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*. 475-425 BCE.

Jucker Collection, Bern.

Photo: Oakley (2004: 136, fig. 98).

Consider two *lekythoi* on which the mythological transportation by Hypnos and Thanatos is expressed with self-conscious artifice. One in the Berlin Staatliche Museen shows three female figures visiting a gravestone with a 'sculpted' Hypnos, Thanatos and corpse group on its finial (FIGURES 2.7A-B);[130] another in Bern shows the immortal brothers painted on a miniature hydria set upon the monument steps (FIGURE 2.8).[131] In each case the mythological register is simultaneously an artistic one, and both of these explicitly artistic versions of the scene recall an image with a rich iconographical and literary tradition.[132] Thus, though all elements of the images on these *lekythoi* are themselves part of a painted pot, the juxtaposition of supposedly real, larger living bodies of female mourners with miniature artistic representations of Hypnos and Thanatos, distinguishes two visual ontologies, real and artificial-mythological, and place the body of the deceased into the latter. In a play of presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, reality and mythology, real and artistic, these two examples turn attention on the epistemological challenges of encountering death and the dead. The strategies employed are comparable to Plato's use of Socrates' eschatological myth towards the end of the *Phaedo* (see chapter one).

[130] *BAPD* 46170. On the contrast here (between the worlds of the living and the dead): Díez de Velasco (1995: 35). A range of readings: Giudice (2015: 43-44). Curtius (1895: 91) was onto this visuality with his interpretation of the *acroterion* form as 'a visionary appearance' (*einer visionären Erscheinung*), demonstrating how fourth-century art reached an apex of emotional expression.
[131] *BAPD* 9022305. On the 'jeu d'image' of the hydria as 'vase en abîme' that opens onto the mythic, heroic arena, mediating between the pot and the dead: Lissarrague (2000). See further Giudice (2015: 47) on the combination of the heroic motif with the female figures as an aristocratic and marginalised resistance of sorts to the egalitarian state burials in this period.
[132] See further De Cesare (1997: 69-75) on replication and citation of sculptural art in vase painting, including the preface by Salvatore Settis (pp. 13-15) on *mise en abyme* and the possibility that schemata and motifs migrated between art forms. See Squire (2018b: 530) for another visual 'quotation' on a funerary object (Chairedemos as the *Doryphoros* on an Attic stele).

Death, then, is closer than it was for handlers of the Getty cup insofar as the primary context of a *lekythos* is a funerary one and the deceased that is imagined to be mourned is conceptually 'real' (which is to say, not a mythological character). But it is also multiply less visible, less revealed than Ajax's dead body. The subject of the grave visit that is so popular on *lekythoi* in the fifth century confronts, in its own way, problems of distance and invisibility.

Death and the Object

The association between the form of painted *lekythoi* and the existential and epistemological reflections that they generate is not, however, restricted to mythological scenes (in fact, mythological scenes are comparatively rare on *lekythoi* in the classical period). Let us, then, continue this theme by considering how, in scenes drawn from real Athenian life, *lekythoi* painters explore representational and ontological difference, using visuality and materiality to unravel conceptual nonexistence.[133]

On one example in the Ashmolean Museum, a grave marker dominates the scene framed by two figures in red drapery looking inwards (Figures 2.9a-c).[134] On the right stands a youth, his body in a frontal pose and his head in profile; on the left a woman, shown fully in profile, carries an *alabastron* and *plemochoe*.

[133] Nathaniel Jones's study of the image theory that unfurls within the images on *lekythoi* is key here. Exploring the 'raw data', in his words, 'from which [the] philosophical systems [of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle] were constructed', he pinpoints the epistemological and ontological reflections that are and might be crystallised by a painted pot's formal properties. See Jones (2015). See further note 110.
[134] *BAPD* 213986; Beazley (1925: 377.4); *ARV*^{2} 998.165; *Add*^{2} 313.

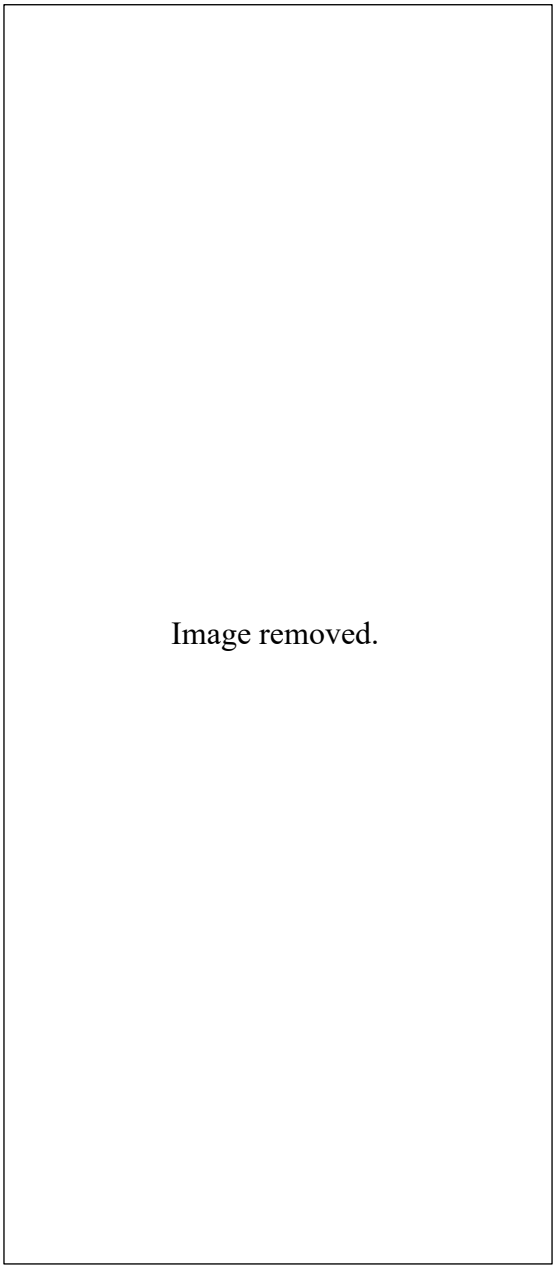


FIGURE 2.9A

Lekythos (figures at the grave) (centre view).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Achilles Painter. 475-425 BCE.

Found in Greece (Attica, Laurion).

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: V524.

Photo: *BAPD*.

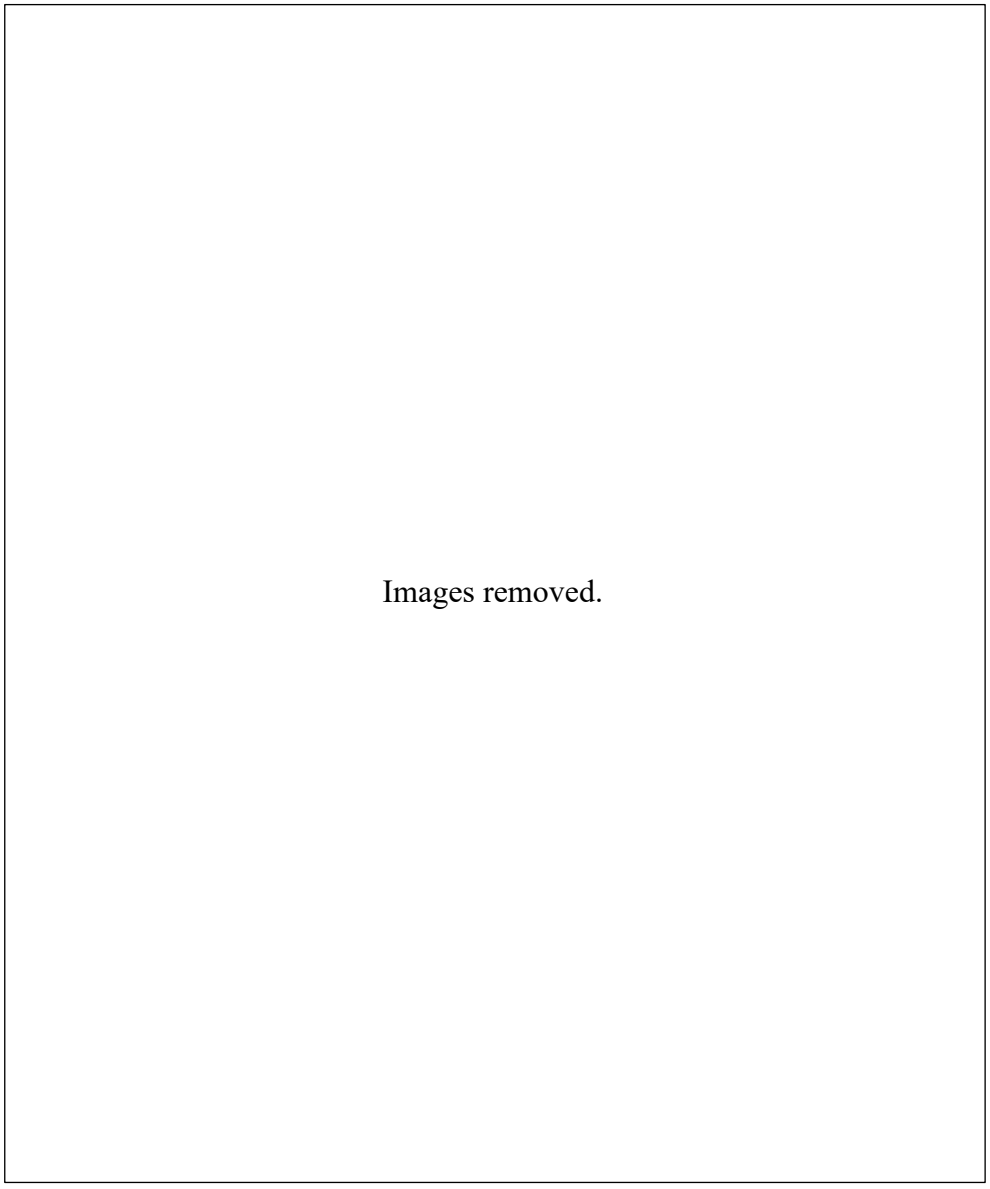


FIGURE 2.9B AND 2.9C

Lekythos (figures at the grave) (left and right views).

See caption for FIGURE 2.9A.

The simplicity of the monument's representation in outline with no colouring or ornamentation is stark and plays on the absence of the deceased with the emptiness

of its two-dimensional frame.[135] This flatness is set against two figures rendered in depth and colour. They, like external viewers, look upon an image that is *unlike* them. The composition, with its combination of dimensionalities, presents the idea that these two painted figures are real and are looking at a drawing, just like external viewers are looking at a drawing on a pot. Is this, perhaps, a reminder that these material objects (pots, monuments) are symbols, signs, tokens of loved ones? They provoke comfort, but also loss, pain and grief, by offering a source of connection that is defined as artefactual and imaginative.

Compare the impact of an Athenian *lekythos* attributed to the Inscription Painter and held in the National Museum of Athens (FIGURES 2.10A-B).[136] This one, too, has more naturalistic features, such as the soft curves of the figures and gestures of grief that are quiet and private by comparison with the theatricality of *prothesis* scenes.[137] And again, these features are combined with the impression of a cardboard cut-out monument in outline.[138] The two *lekythoi* that hang in symmetrical negative mirror image (silhouette and outline) seemingly in mid-air on each side of the monument's acroterion reiterate the ontological difference, aligning pot and tombstone, object and image.[139]

[135] Compare: *BAPD* 1140, 1921, 1924, 3889, 11695, 12688, 209247.
[136] *BAPD* 209239; *ARV*^{2} 748.2, 1668; *Para* 413.2; *Add*^{2} 284.
[137] The emotive power of this image: Oakley (2004: 146). See further Riezler (1914: 99, fig. 17) for the rare image of a woman weeping. The value of pots such as this one as evidence for female cult (by comparison with critical male-produced sources): Håland (2014: 466).
[138] This impression is enhanced by the fact that the otherwise elaborate acroterion is apparently transparent: the lines of the upper border run through it. The four circles at the base of the monument: Oakley (2004: 191-92); Christina Avronidaki on cat. 119 in Oikonomou (2014); Haspels (1936: 172, n. 1); *CVA* Athens, National Museum 1: III.J.c.6 on pls. 6.3-5 (K. Rhomaios). Compare Platt (2017: 381) on 'the sarcophagus' function as both frame and container': here, the outline technique puts the (blank) image of death centre stage and acknowledges the remains 'contained' nearby.
[139] *CVA* Athens, National Museum 1: III.J.c.7 on pls. 6.3-5 (K. Rhomaios): 'leur charactère est purement décoratif'.

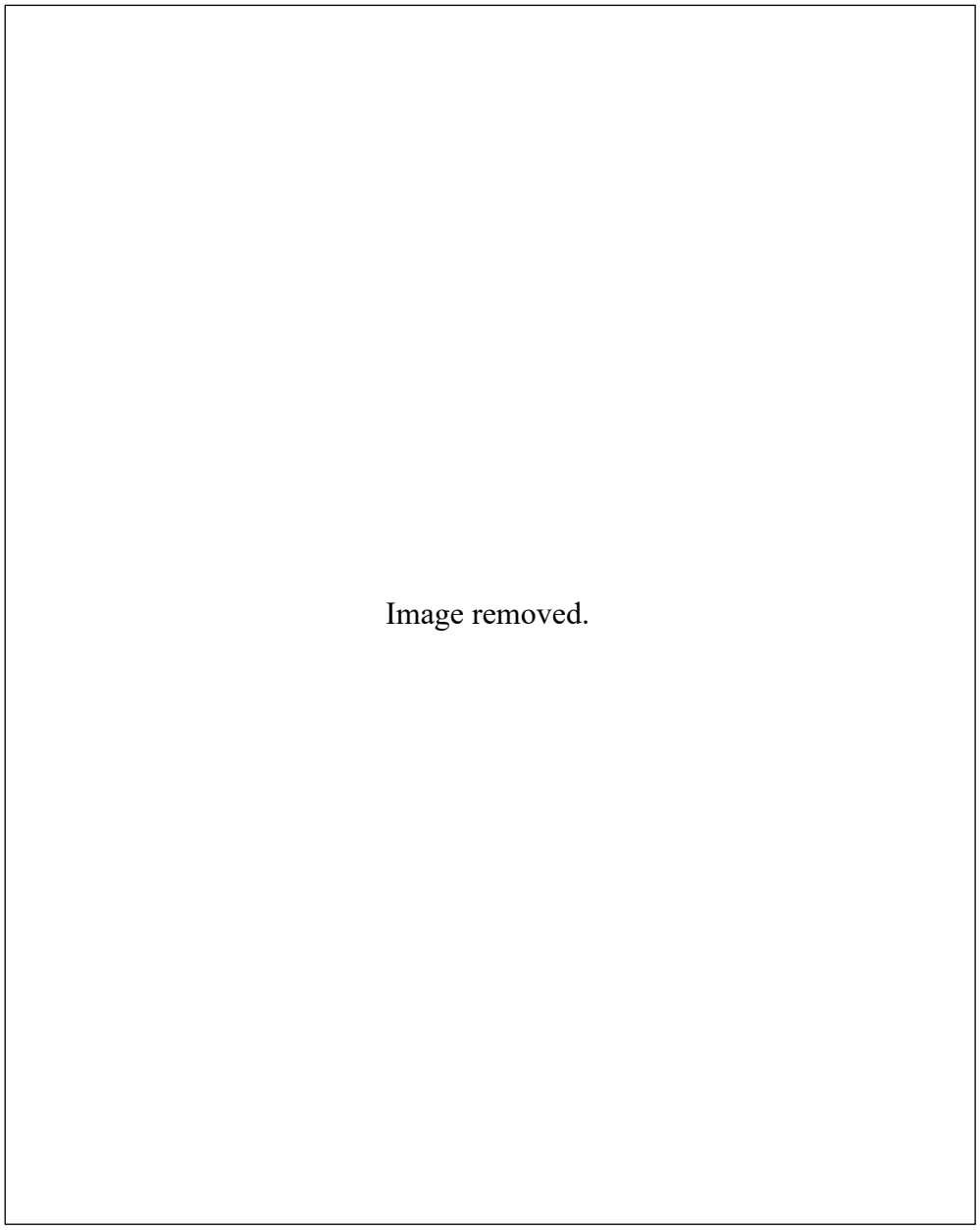


FIGURE 2.10A

Lekythos (stele with inscription) (left and right views).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Inscription Painter. 500-450 BCE.

Height 36.5cm, Diameter 12cm.

Found in Greece (Euboea, Eretria).

National Museum, Athens: CC1690.

Photo: *CVA* Athens National Museum 1, pl. 6.3-4.

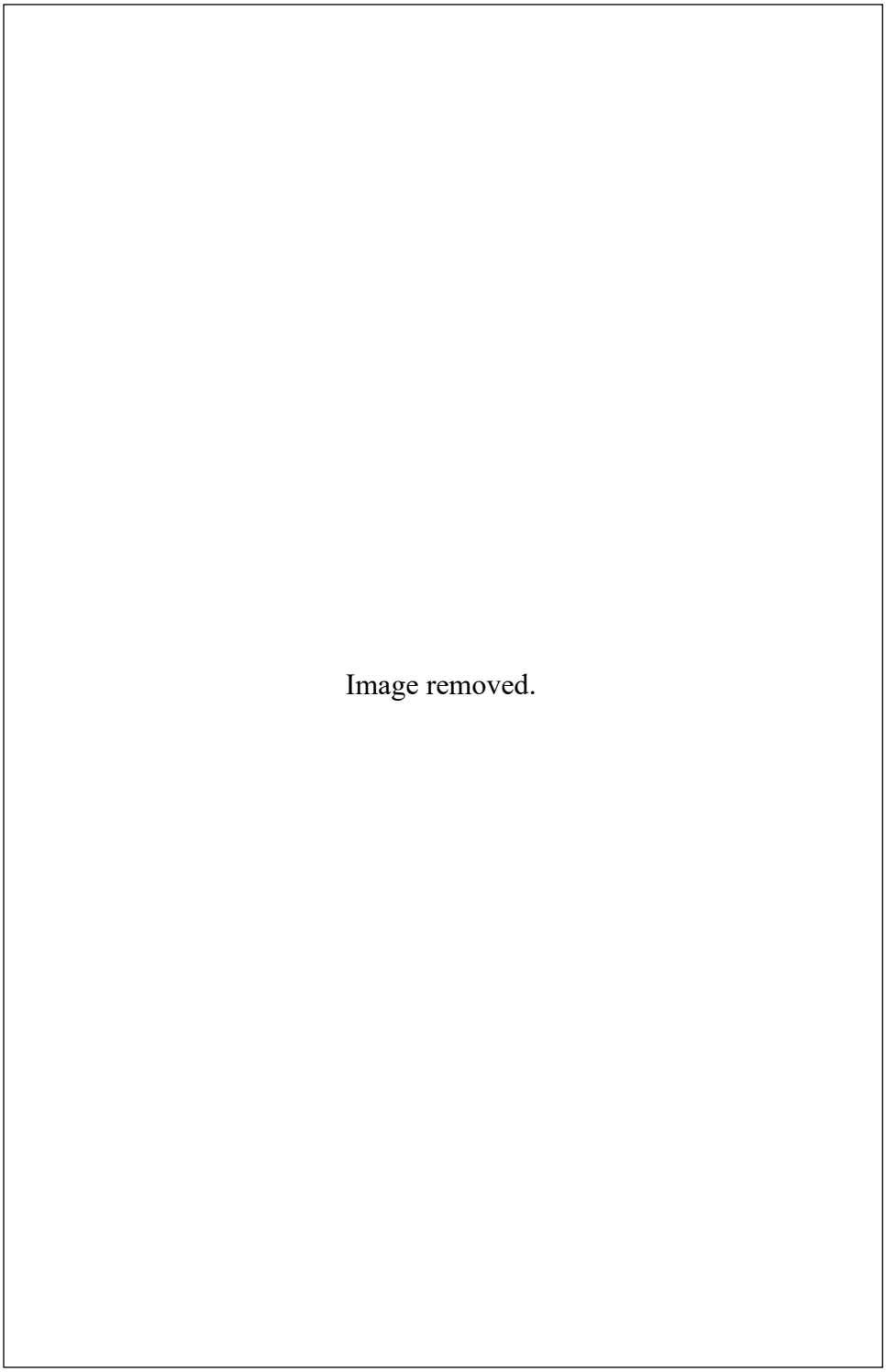


FIGURE 2.10B

Lekythos (stele with inscription).

See caption for FIGURE 2.10A.

Photo: *CVA* Athens National Museum 1, pl. 5.

Moreover, here, as on many examples, the top of the stele impinges on the border that runs around the top of the pot's body: the monument does not fit in the scene; it, like the painted *lekythoi* (which either defy gravity or else are transported from a home environment), is out of place.[140] The clash is, again, appropriate: the deceased, too, is of another time, another space.[141]

In images that take as their subject continued communion between the living and the dead, the impact is not so much disorientating (as it was on the Getty cup) as painful.[142] The monument that represents the deceased is so overtly a product of line and paint that it rejects a real relationship with the figures, an impact that is similar to the cold pleasure of Admetus' surrogate wife or the hateful charm of statues in the eyes of Menelaus.[143] However you spin it (whether an imaginative encounter is undercut by awareness that it is not real, or, as Tom Phillips suggests, the imagination thrills at its ability to produce an affective and sensory encounter in an unreal situation),[144] imaginative encounters have a double nature, real and unreal, pleasant and painful. Compare how in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, funeral honours seem, to Hecuba, a vain opportunity for the living to boast; even so, their performance stirs the bitter response ἰὼ ἰώ· | μελέα μήτηρ.[145] Seth Estrin's work on the bittersweet nature of memory images on funerary objects is important here: like monuments, *lekythoi* were, and to some extent still claim to be, sites of encounter with specific deceased loved ones that continue to impress their presence upon the

[140] Compare: *BAPD* 648, 2323, 2327, 8941, 10342, 10912, 11520, 16829, 209247.
[141] On images of the dead on *lekythoi* as memory images that preserve an unavoidable absence and the impossibility of communication, see Baldassare (1988: 115).
[142] The 'fragmentation of the visual field' that Richard Neer (Neer (2002)) identifies in archaic and early classical vase-painting permeates these pots, but the artistry that undercuts naturalist representation shows less 'pleasing tension' and more painful disjuncture.
[143] Eur. *Alc.* 353; Aesch. *Ag.* 416-19.
[144] Phillips (Forthcoming) on Menelaus' dream visions of Helen.
[145] Eur. *Tro.* 1250-52.

living via the affective power of objects.[146] But this dynamic is also what makes *lekythoi* effective mediators of existential reflection: viewers are primed to think not just about a lost loved one, but about death more generally, a death that they will, at some point, share. In an existential sense, too, what is to one mind a representational flop is to another an imaginative triumph: the features that expose the monument as an image also render it a site of encounter with death as difference, as absence of life.

Indeed, it is not just one pot, or even two, that mourners see on the Met *lekythos* (this is true of many works attributed to the Bosanquet Painter) (FIGURES 2.4A-C).[147] The *mise en abyme* of a painted *lekythos* on a terracotta *lekythos* is refracted into several miniature black pots that litter the monument's painted steps.[148] Visualisation of death involves not one but many vanishing points of endless iteration. Such redundancy is not just for emphasis,[149] but also performs a visual ὀτοτοτοτοῖ, each pot another silent cry of woe.[150] Like the alliteration with which Sappho's Aphrodite mourns Adonis—καττύπτεσθε, κόραι, καὶ κατερείκεσθε χίθωνας—reiterated images articulate a ritual lament, only here in a material-visual form as opposed to a verbal-sonic one.[151] Moreover, many painted black pots on one *lekythos* echo the numerous real ones among which this *lekythos* might be seen

[146] See Estrin (2016) and (2018) on archaic and classical funerary monuments. See further Arrington (2018: 21-23) on *pothos* for the deceased and tombs as substitutes for absent bodies.
[147] On the Bosanquet Painter, see Oakley (1997b). Also: *BAPD* 216329, 216331, 216332, 216333.
[148] These are all the more striking against the white background. Death, repetition, commemoration and intermediality: Trimble (2018: 339-42).
[149] See further Hutchinson (2017) on the impact of repetition in the *Iliad*; note 155. Compare Steiner (2007) on repetition as aesthetic and communicative; she does not consider repetition as meaningful *qua* repetition (i.e. *marking*, instead of, or as well as, combating entropy).
[150] Compare repetitive gestures at the *prothesis* on the Berlin *loutrophoros*, discussed above.
[151] Sappho 140 Voigt = 140a LP. Alexiou and lament: note 31.

at the grave.[152] Each pot is an individual gift (his *aryballos*, her *alabastron*); each is part of a near homogenous heap of objects of like shape and decoration, image after image of scenes at or in preparation for the grave.[153]

Moreover, if this visual lament of iterated objects is a human response to the chaos of death, it not only fights entropy, but performs it.[154] Even as the repetition essays a continuation that marches against the narrative of death as climactic end, it creates an atemporal lack of development that expounds death's timeless nothing. And the universality of the one amongst many mentality is as reassuring as it is disempowering: what is one more pot on the pile?[155] Even the permanence of the object, a lasting memorial, is fragile. Compare how in *Trojan Women*, Hector's 'undying' shield, shadow of its former glory, 'will die with the body'.[156] On this example from the Metropolitan Museum, two *lekythoi* have fallen over and one garland unravels (FIGURES 2.4A-C).[157]

[152] Many *lekythoi* form a group at the grave and the cemetery level. Consider one discovery of seven *lekythoi* in a tomb: Schmidt (2005: 53).
[153] Members of a visual corpus, *lekythoi* participate in the sorts of visual conversations discussed in Day (2018). Moreover, while images are not identical (on which, see Osborne (2012), who emphasises the pressure that Athenian pot images put upon expectations and the questions that they raise), they are often variations on a theme. See Osborne (1998: 17) on the Hirschfeld Krater, 'individuality is of no importance'; Sourvinou-Inwood (1995: 335) for a nexus between individualisation and generic persona; Walter-Karydi (2015: 142) on life-sized *eidola* on *lekythoi* as generic figures of the dead rather than representations of the deceased buried nearby; Arrington (2018: 9) on generic types in funerary sculpture. See further Lissarrague (2001: 120-21) on the generic nature of an unreadable inscription ('the image of a text') on a *lekythos* by the Inscriptions Painter (discussed above, FIGURES 2.10A-B). But an unreadable painted inscription does not just '[leave] unspecified what is to be read' by the buyer (as Francois Lissarrague suggests); it anonymises the deceased, whose name has dissolved into a meaningless letter-image.
[154] An overview of information theory, and repetition or redundancy as a 'language code to combat entropy' in the context of Greek pots: Steiner (2007: esp. 10-15). A Greek drive to impose order on chaos: Pollitt (1972: 3).
[155] See Elsner (2018b: 354) on ornamental repetition on sarcophagi and 'the repetition of death itself as an endless and unavoidable replication'. Consider the visual resemblance of the miniature black *eidolon* and the miniature black pot.
[156] Eur. *Tro.* 1222-23.
[157] Fallen vessels on *lekythoi*: Arrington (2014).

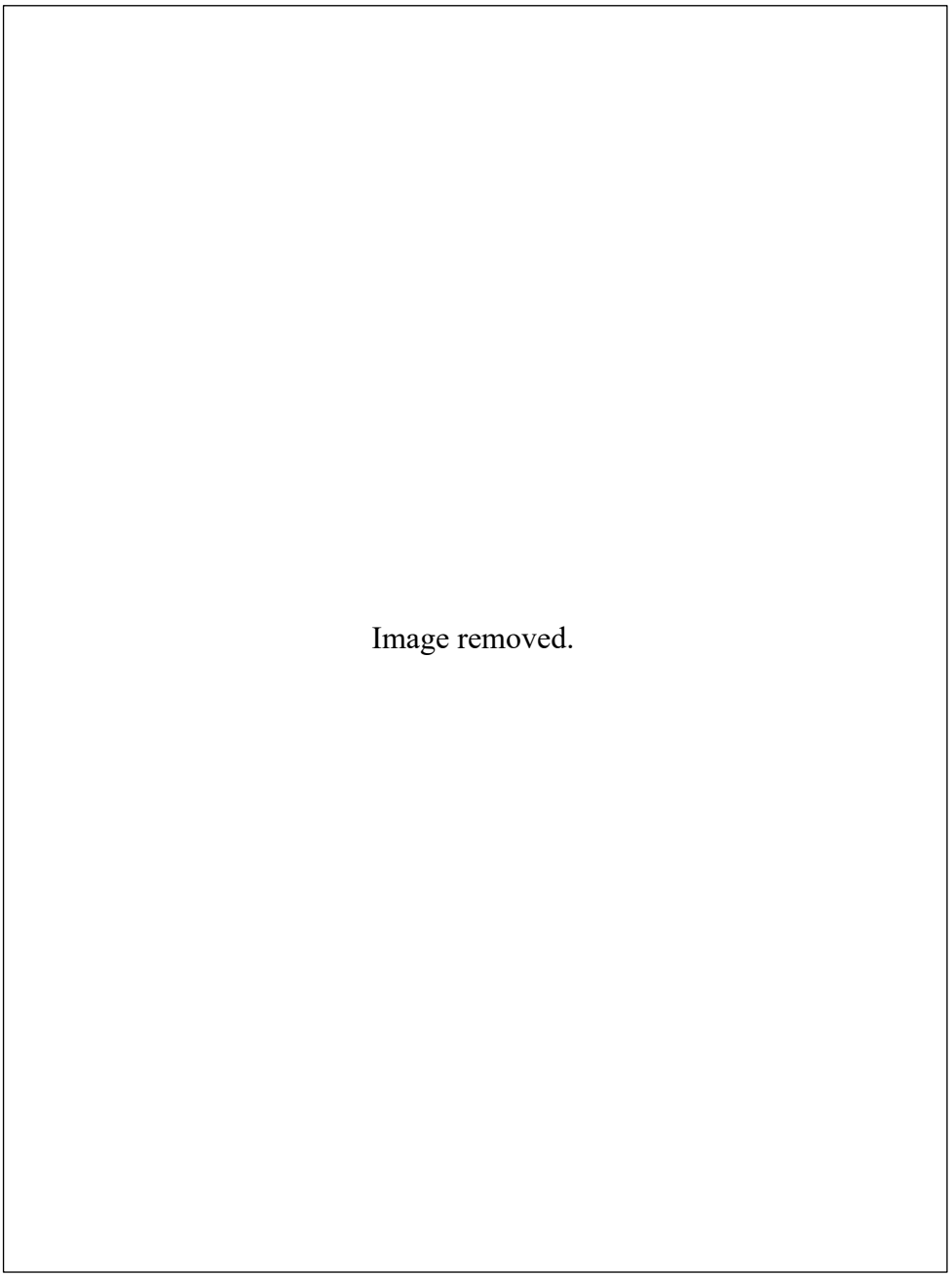


FIGURE 2.11

Lekythos (abandoned grave).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*. 500-450 BCE. Height 14.8cm, Diameter 6.5cm.

Musée du Louvre, Paris: CA3758.

Photo: © 2003 RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.

On another unique example in the Louvre (FIGURE 2.11), the painter has depicted a tomb that is untended or abandoned; the branches that descend like a final curtain over the steps of the monument will soon extinguish from sight, and from memory, even the rubbish heap of upended pots at its base.[158]

Thus, these images that look upon death sideways through the eyes and memories of survivors are also laced with anticipation of death to come in the fragility of the objects that represent and perform death in their actual or projected fragmentation.[159] Looking back on another's death in memory collides with anticipation of inevitable mortality.[160]

REFLECTIONS ON REFLECTIONS

As stated above, one of the distinguishing features of *lekythoi* in this period is the focus of their scenes on the real life of Athenians. In fact, scenes are not just more ordinary, but more domestic; women and children predominate rather than mythological heroes or divinities. This has sent scholarship in two important directions. In the first place, historians of Athenian attitudes to death have drawn on *lekythoi*, and especially on the increased popularity of so-called 'marginal figures', to reinforce a narrative, beginning in the eighth century and accelerating

[158] *BAPD* 3032. This image may also be interpreted as explicit acknowledgement of the need to remember departed relatives with funerary rites (in accordance with Athenian law): see Schmidt (2005: 45-46, fig. 10). See note 17. But by acknowledging the real risk of decay and oblivion in the absence of action, this scene also concedes the engulfing power of death.
[159] On a similar note: Boardman (1988: 176) on pierced cups from graves as examples of 'the cancelling or killing of a practical vessel'. See further Vout (2014) on objects' 'lost-ness', their 'rhetoric of unreachability'. Compare Arrington (2014: 7): the fragility of objects contrasts with 'the stable presence of the deceased'.
[160] See note 56. See further Osborne (1988: 13) on other pot images that muse on 'the fragility of human life'.

in the archaic period, of increasing awareness of and interest in an individual experience of death and continued existence in some sort of afterlife.[161] Secondly, and more recently, Robin Osborne has emphasised a more extensive shift in the subject matter on pots in classical Athens, with images 'mirroring' real Athenian life as opposed to offering a window onto a separate world.[162]

In the final part of this chapter, I will explore the potentiality of scenes on *lekythoi* to act as mirrors, and what this does for existential reflection. I will focus, however, not so much upon the real-life subject matter on *lekythoi* as upon the compositions and styles that accompany it. The combination encourages viewers to meditate upon, not just their own equivalent situation as mourners, but their situation as persons that meditate on an existential situation by interacting with objects.

Let us consider, first, one popular motif on *lekythoi*: the seated figure. This image also becomes prevalent on Attic stelai at the end of the fifth century and throughout the fourth (the grave stele of Hegeso is a well-known example) and it seems that *lekythoi* anticipate this fashion.[163] My first example is a *lekythos* in the National Museum of Athens (FIGURES 2.12A-B).[164]

[161] See especially Sourvinou-Inwood (1981), (1995). See further Allen (2018), also highlighting the emphasis on an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead.
[162] Osborne (2018: 249-50), emphasising that fifth-century scenes in some respects involve less imaginative visual engagement; the world represented is the same world inhabited by painters and purchasers of the pots. Osborne proposes this metaphor in riposte to Jaś Elsner's suggestion that the Greek revolution was characterised by a change in viewing, from direct engagement with a gaze to vicarious experience from the outside as voyeur of an imaginary world of glances (see Elsner (2006)). But, for reasons outlined in the conclusion to this chapter, this seems to be a false opposition. It is possible for content to mirror the viewers' world, but for engagement with that world to be indirect.
[163] Though Oakley (2004: 219-23) rejects a direct line of influence.
[164] *BAPD* 215484; *ARV*[2] 1168.131*bis*.

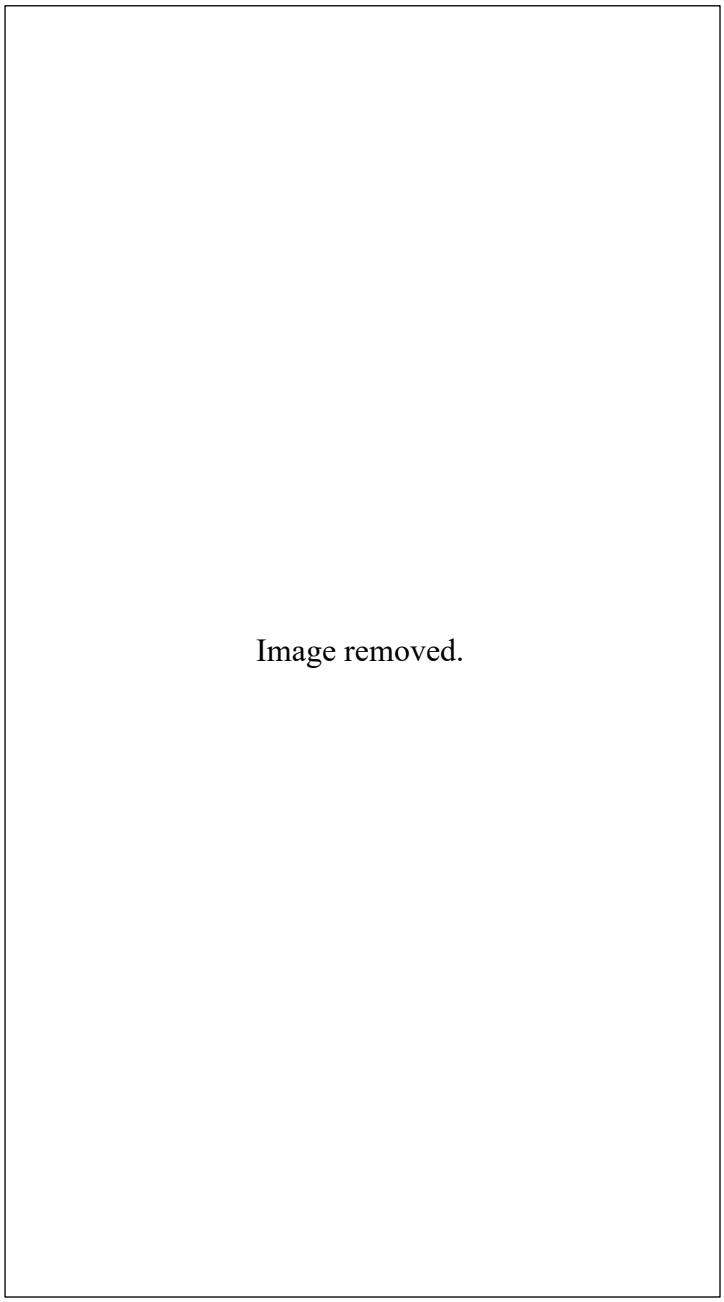


FIGURE 2.12A

Lekythos (figures at the grave) (left view).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*. 450-400.

Found in Greece (Attica, Anavyssos).

National Museum, Athens: 19354.

Photo: *BAPD*.

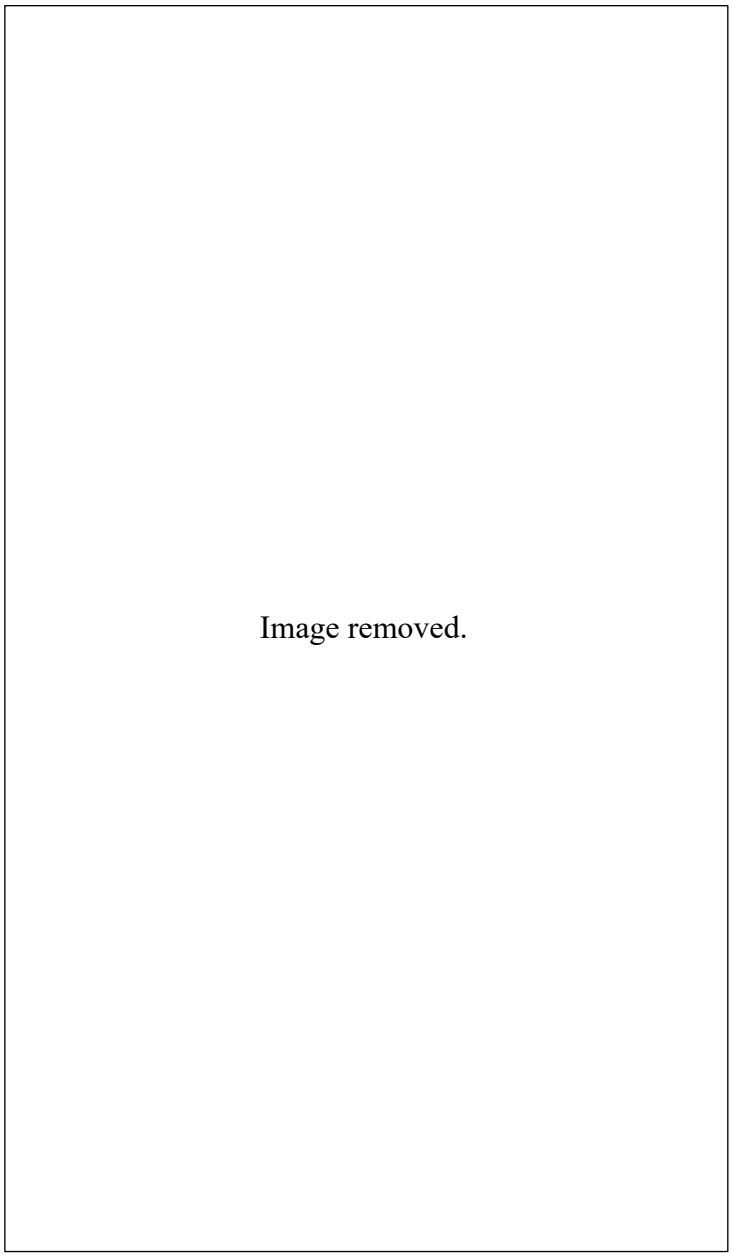


FIGURE 2.12B

Lekythos (figures at the grave) (right view).

See caption for FIGURE 2.12A.

Again, two figures frame and face a monument. To the left stands a male figure, his body presented in a three-quarters pose, his head in profile. To the right, a female figure sits upon a block, perhaps the base of a monument. With her right hand she

holds the top of the stele; in her left she holds an *alabastron* at which she stares with bowed head. Her pose, and the pot that she holds, suggests that she is mourning, though there is no reason why she might not mourn her own life rather than another's. The triangulation of painted pot, monument and mourner, who connects both objects with her body, sight and mind, calls attention to another three-way relationship between three figures in conceptual mirror image to this pot-monument-mourner group.[165] This second trio comprises the two painted figures and one real one: the external viewer.[166] The painted man sees a monument (for him, visually and materially present) and visualises a death. The painted woman sees a pot and visualises a monument (either materially present, for her, but also seen in her mind as stimulated by the touch of her hand and association with the pot, or else mentally present and shown to the reader as a manifestation of her imaginative response to the pot) and visualises a death. The external viewer sees a real pot and a painting, from which he or she visualises all the above, and also visualises another monument and another death (of a friend or family member), both present only in the imagination.[167] The convoluted network of visual ontologies prompted by multifarious relationships between viewers, objects,

[165] In this respect, *pace* Osborne (2018: 250), the image can be *both* 'keyhole' and 'mirror'. Tensions of immersion and reflection in aesthetic experience: Grethlein (2017: esp. pt. 2).
[166] Identification of figures as deceased or visitor aside, Kardara (1960: 157) makes a pertinent observation that communication between painted figures takes place through the external spectator.
[167] By which I mean that anyone focusing on the pot must make a mental link to a grave (nearby or not); I do not make claims as to whether stelai depicted on *lekythoi* existed or were products of painters' imagination, on which debate see Oakley (2004: 214). Arguing that questions of archaeological reality distract from the metaphorical discourse staged by the centrality of figured monuments on *lekythoi*: Baldassare (1988: esp. 111-12). Compare Schilardi (1984) on *lekythoi* images as evidence for the production of free-standing sarcophagi from the middle of the fifth century onwards.

images and the dead, unravels the mediated, imaginative process of conceptualising death.[168]

This philosophical visuality finds expression in other experiments with the seated figure at the tomb. On another example in the National Museum of Athens (FIGURE 2.13),[169] a youth is depicted seated upon the steps of a monument. The fillets that often adorn the monument are instead suspended above his head. Whatever else this might mean,[170] one effect is a shift between figure and monument: as the monument stands for the deceased, so might the figure. Each image stands at some degree of remove from the remembered dead, so one image might as well be wreathed as another. Perhaps, even, the fillet wreaths the whole painting, or the pot. And, for that matter, why not set that wreath figuratively over the head of the real viewer that holds the pot and might stand, or sit, beside a real grave? The play of visual ontologies does not just prompt epistemological reflection on the mediated nature of encountering death and the dead, it implicates the viewer more urgently in an existential situation.

[168] This chimes with Arrington (2014: 3): 'lekythoi painters strove not after realism but to present the idea of a grave and the concept of a grave visit'; see further Arrington (2015: 264). Death and the limits of vision: Turner (2016: esp. 144-45, 154-55, 160).
[169] *BAPD* 209240; *ARV*[2] 748.3; *Para* 413; *Add*[2] 284.
[170] The fillets may be pinned to a wall that forms a backdrop to the scene. Less literally, they may hang in the background as part of a funerary scene just as items are suspended in domestic scenes (note Bosanquet (1899: 171) on the hanging object as a 'force of habit'). It may signal that a man who otherwise appears alive is in fact dead. For a tentative view that the youth is deceased (acknowledging ambiguity): Riezler (1914: 98, fig. 16). For ambiguity: Oakley (2004: 148-49).

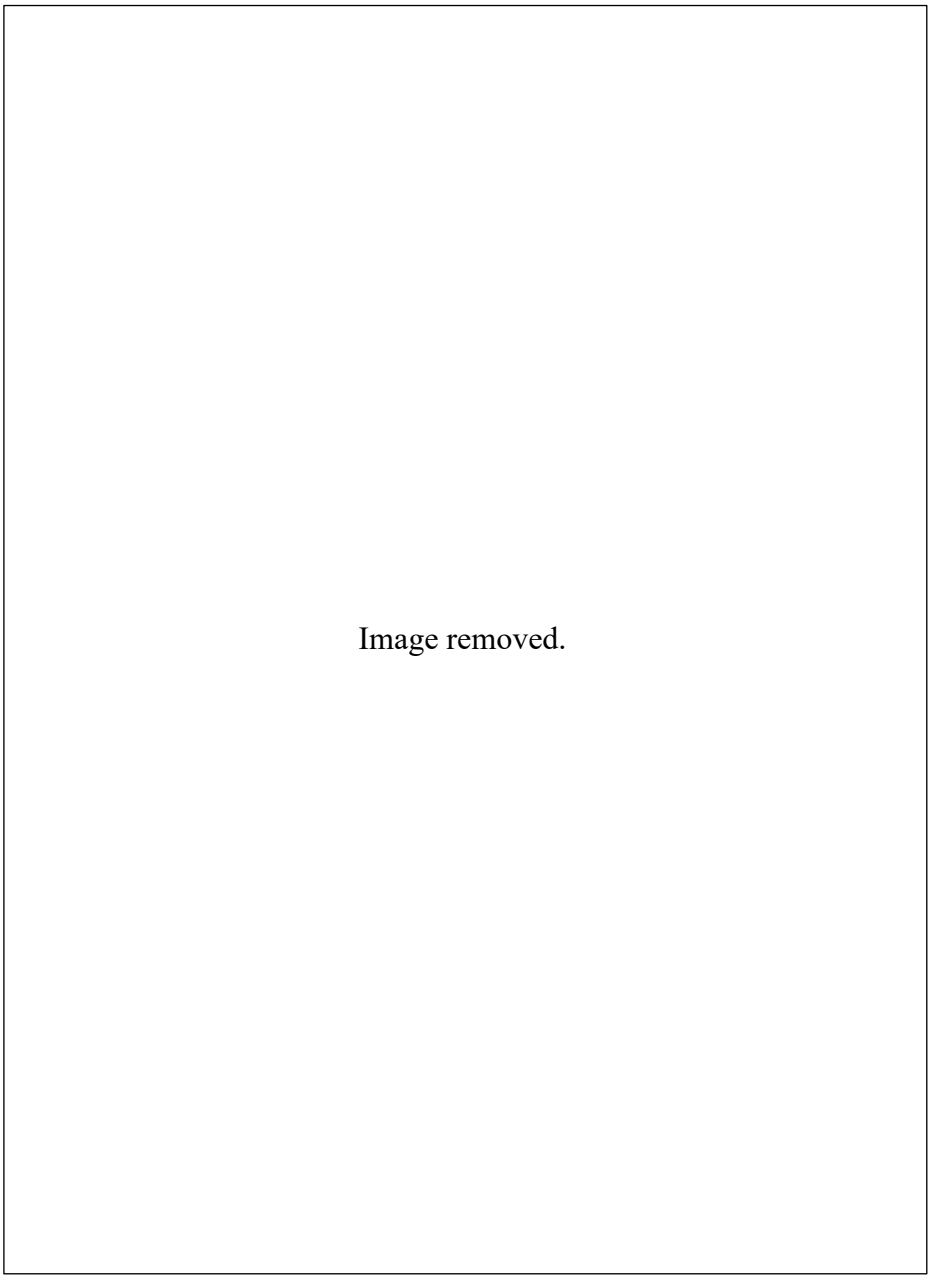


FIGURE 2.13

Lekythos (seated male figure) (left and right views).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Inscription Painter. 500-450 BCE.

Height 36cm, Diameter 12cm.

Found in Greece (Euboea, Eretria).

National Museum, Athens: CC1691.

Photo: *CVA* Athens National Museum 1, pl. 6.6-7.

My next examples of this motif are provided by three pots that have all been attributed to the Tymbos Painter. Variation of the repeated seated figure image reveals a mixture of visualities and emphasis on how interaction with objects might prompt existential reflection. On a *lekythos* in the Ashmolean Museum (FIGURE 2.14),[171] a woman is seated on a chair facing right and extending her arms outwards. Above her is suspended a mirror.[172] To the right is depicted a monument. The impact of the mirror is two-fold. It presents the image of the painted woman as a reflection of the real viewer, and also as a reflection of the monument. The triangulation refracts the implicit mortality of the painted woman onto the viewer. Crucially, the external viewer is instrumental in this association. The arrangement of the seated figure and the monument on this pot makes it difficult to see both images at the same time. Though the two images are inherently one by virtue of their coexistence on the single object of the *lekythos*,[173] the connection is visually generated by external viewers when they handle the pot. With a turn to the right, the image of the seated figure in an apparently domestic environment, implicitly a reflection of the real viewer, is transformed into an encounter with death and the dead in a literal or imaginative visit to the tomb. Indeed, the painted figure is also instrumental. Her open-armed gesture is much like that of Tecmessa over Ajax's body (FIGURE 2.1A): it is the sort of gesture with which one would seek to embrace a loved one, or their corpse. Her arms respond to an absence, an absence that is heightened by the invisibility of the monument until the pot is turned. But they also serve as a directional imperative upon the real viewer, pointing the way to the image

[171] *BAPD* 209288; *ARV*[2] 754.13; *Add*[2] 285.
[172] Instances of mirrors on funerary monuments: Cavalier (1994: 111-16). See Squire (2018b: 534-35) on what mirrors on Attic stelai might do for meditation on death.
[173] On the deliberately ambiguous juxtaposition of domestic and funerary contexts in this image, see Giudice (2015: 137-39).

on the other side, and urging them, in turn, to reach, to touch and to hold the body of the pot. An encounter with death, born of an identification between real and painted worlds, is actively generated by an interaction between handler and pot.

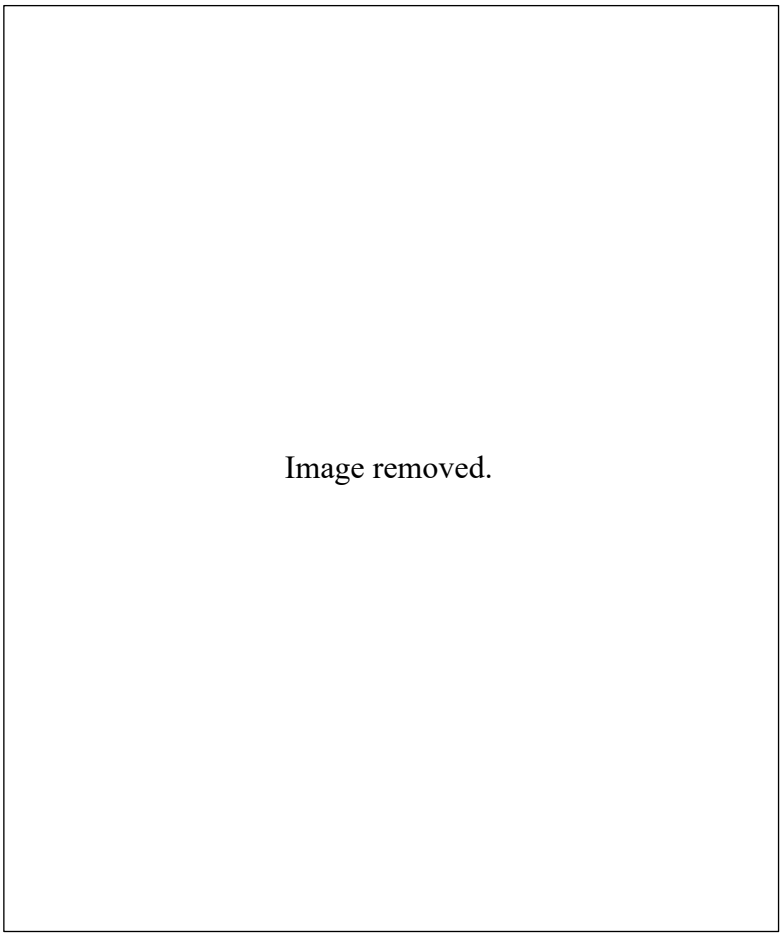


FIGURE 2.14

Lekythos (seated female figure).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Tymbos Painter and ATL Class.

500-450 BCE.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: 1956.14.

Photo: Giudice (2015: 138, fig. 13).

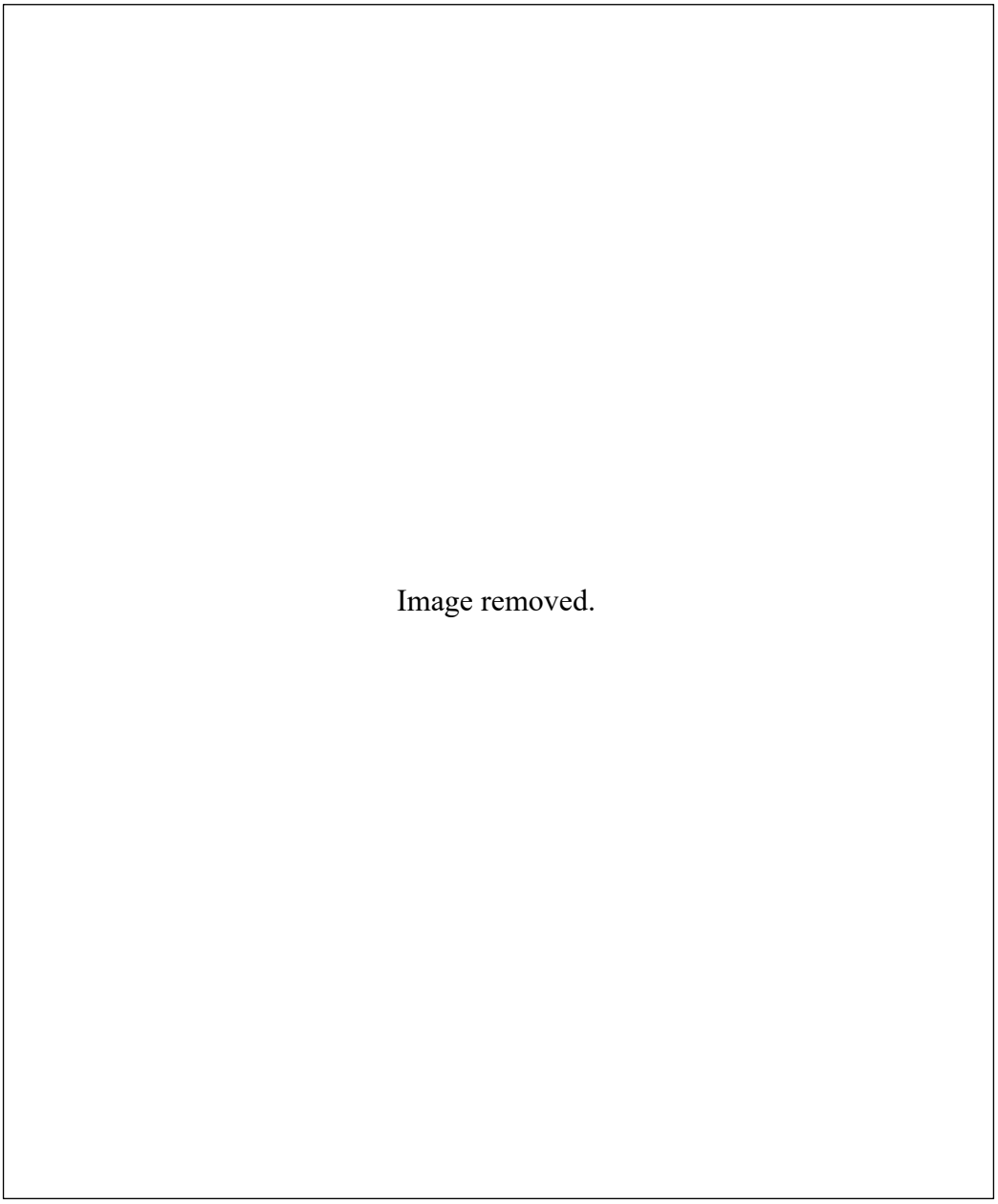


FIGURE 2.15

Lekythos (seated female figure).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Tymbos Painter and ATL Group.

475-425 BCE. Height 23.4cm, Diameter 7.7cm.

Eberhard-Karls-Universität, Archäologisches Institut, Tübingen: S101499.

Photo: *CVA* Tübingen, Antikensammlung 5, 26.6, 26.8-9.

In a second example, from Tübingen (FIGURE 2.15), a similar image of a seated woman is now placed directly in front of the face of the monument.[174] It thus becomes unclear whether the woman is real or graven. The superimposition of painted representations of notionally different visual ontology aligns mourner and mourned, who are both visualised on the basis of colour and line and each subject to death past and future. It is ambiguous, for example, whether this figure gives or receives the wreath in her hands. And if she gives it, does this not also implicate the viewer, who takes it into his or her hands on grasping the pot? The painted image once more reflects the viewer, but stages them as both subject and object at the grave. To the extent that it forges a visual link between mourner and deceased (in that they coexist in one image), this *lekythos* gives material expression to a process of encountering the dead through objects and memory. But that living and dead visually share one body also prompts more existential meditation on a shared situation, and reflects that situation back upon the real viewer and handler of the pot, who might well also stand in front of a grave (albeit, for much of the fifth century, not one with a monument bearing figure sculpture).

[174] *BAPD* 209282; *ARV*[2] 754.7; *Add*[2] 285. This is a popular motif with the Tymbos Painter: see further *BAPD* 209279, 209286, 209284. Compare 209343 for a similar composition in which a man sits, apparently enjoying a picnic. Also: 209383 where a woman, more enlivened, is mourning. *pace* Giudice (2015: 18) who proposes that this sort of image strives to represent the dead as alive. Recognising dubiety as to whether the figure sits before or inside: Kurtz (1975: 83, n. 4).

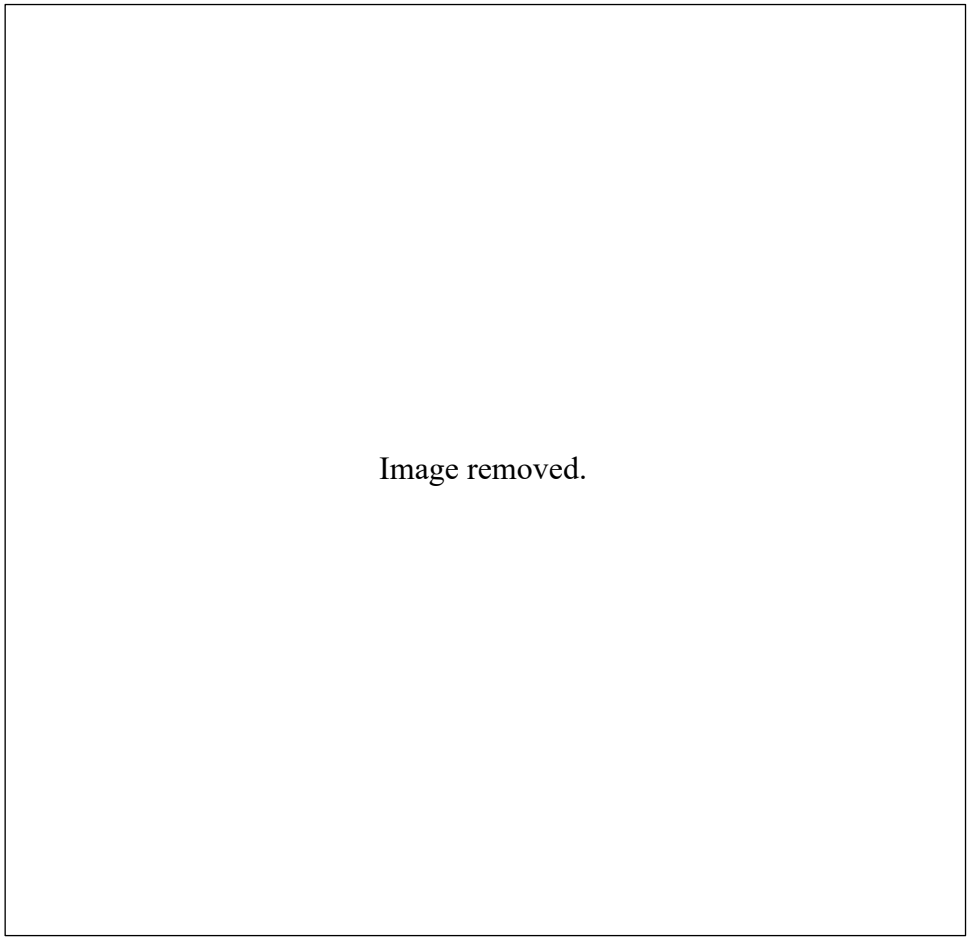


FIGURE 2.16

Lekythos (seated female figure).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Tymbos Painter and ATL Class.

470-460 BCE. Height 22cm, Diameter 7.4cm.

Musée du Louvre, Paris: MNB 3059.

Photo: © 2005 Musée du Louvre / Daniel Lebée / Carine Deambrosis.

My final example is a *lekythos* in the Louvre (FIGURE 2.16).[175] On the left, a female figure in profile steps towards the right, holding a garland between outstretched

[175] *BAPD* 209289; *ARV*[2] 754.14; *Add*[2] 285. Compare a *lekythos* that features two figures looking at a monument on which are set two smaller, but in other respects naturalistic, figures (a seated female figure and a child): *BAPD* 212317; Riezler (1914: pl. 22).

arms. She approaches a stele, at the top of which is depicted a scene in a rectangular frame. This internal framed scene shows a second female figure seated on chair and holding a mirror. Behind this second figure is suspended some fabric, perhaps a fillet (though disproportionately large). In a virtuoso iteration of persons of different realities and ontologies (flesh and blood, painted, graven, reflected; real, visualised as real, visualised as image, visualised as reflection of image), the painter draws simultaneous attention to sameness and difference. The visual similarity between these figures points towards their kinship, to the *lekythos* and the sculpted monument as more mirrors in which one might contemplate one's own death. And, by implicating the viewer in endless visualisation of what is absent, the painter creates an ephemeral glimpse of what it might be like for an identifiable, memorable someone to exist no longer. But the difference also sets each outside another's image; each viewer is presented as another's voyeur, underscoring the exteriority that defines the perspective of the living on death. The play of images thus draws attention not just to mortality as a shared endpoint, but also to the epistemological challenges posed by that existential situation.

I close with one final popular image: scenes of preparation for visiting the tomb. Let us begin with a *lekythos* that is held in the National Museum of Athens (FIGURE 2.17).[176] Though the tomb is nowhere to be seen, the preparation of funerary gifts by the two female figures reveals that death is very much present in their minds. The left-hand figure looks upon a fillet; the other, a *lekythos* lowered in her left hand, stares intently at the *alabastron* in her right.

[176] *BAPD* 209186; ARV2 743.5; Add2 284. Similar examples: *BAPD* 16202, 209185, 209188, 209191. Domestic scenes: Oakley (2004: ch. 2, esp. 30-57).

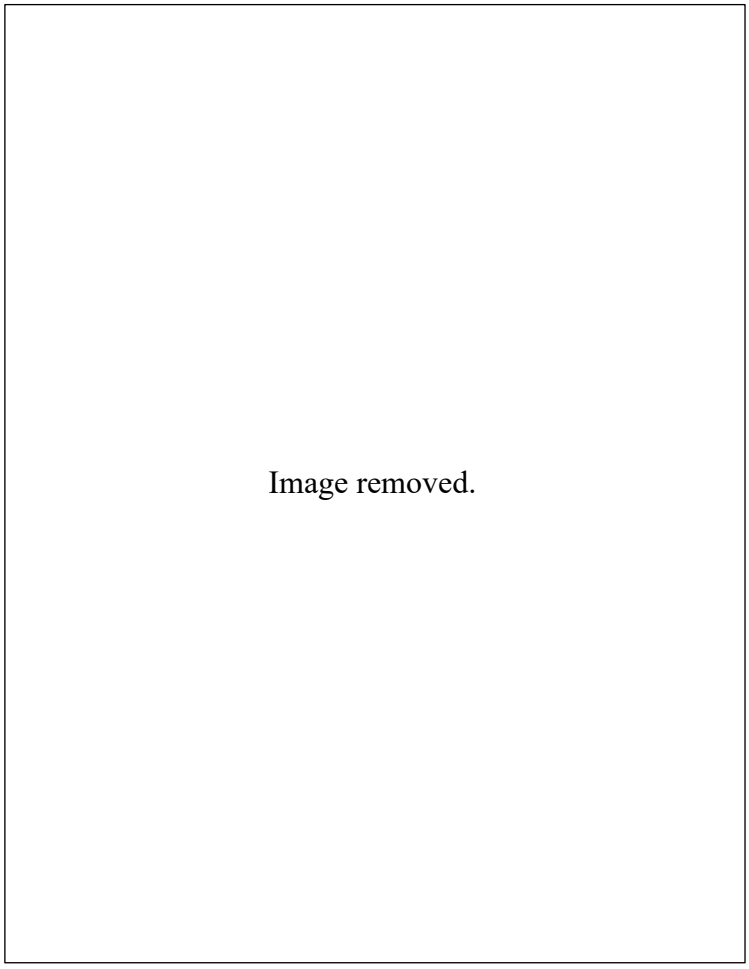


FIGURE 2.17

Lekythos (preparation to visit the grave).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Timokrates Painter. 475-425 BCE.

Found in Greece (Euboea, Eretria).

National Museum, Athens: 1929.

Photo: Oakley (2004: 33, fig. 13).

Does she look at an image or a blank surface, or beyond to an image of the deceased in her memory and the grave that she will soon visit? Or does she visualise all these and more (her own death, perhaps), in a blending of temporalities? Caught in a moment, this domestic scene of still, quiet contemplation both represents and

evokes a prolonged encounter with death.[177] It does so not by showing the dead, or showing a memorial, but by showing an intimate scene of engagement with objects. Indeed, the two figures that face one another become each other's mirror image and, in turn, model the viewer's own relationship with the pot, and with the figures, interactions, and meditations that are represented upon it.

Compare another *lekythos* from the same museum (FIGURE 2.18).[178] The garland woven by the seated female figure hints that a visit to the grave is once more anticipated in the minds of the painted women.[179] In that context, the female figure who stands to the right and plucks a petal from the flower that she holds in her left hand demonstrates the fragility of life, beauty, things even as she gazes into the middle distance—or, rather, upon the painted *lekythos* that hangs before her eyes.[180] This object, a counterpart to the physical *lekythos* upon which it is painted, again reinforces contemplative interaction with objects as one subject of the image. Indeed, the object at the centre of the image (on this orientation) is a garland that is in the process of becoming. Or, perhaps, it has broken. Is this an image of life or death? Like the plucked flower that is sensorily intense but implicitly dying, the encounters that are crystallised in and by this *lekythos* are acute and ephemeral.

[177] Insofar as, on an example such as the Getty cup, action and moment generate forward- and backward-looking temporal imperatives on the moment of death whereas *lekythoi* show an act of ongoing contemplation, this discussion sits alongside conclusions in Osborne (2018: 220-24) on changes in temporality from late archaic to classical images, but with the additional observation that both engage in multiple temporalities to evoke visualisations of death. See Bergmann (1996) on the 'pregnant moment'; Snodgrass (1987) on temporalities and narrative in geometric art; Baldassare (1988: 114-15) on the images of monuments on *lekythoi* as concretising a discourse on memory and absence (not reflecting an archaeological reality).

[178] *BAPD* 209201; *ARV*[2] 745.1.

[179] Compare the interpretation in Schmidt (2005: 49) that the garland is a nuptial attribute reminding of the deceased woman's qualities when alive.

[180] This composition is reminiscent of archaic images of figures holding flowers, such as that on the grave stele for Me[gakles] in the New York Metropolitan Museum, dated to approximately 530 BCE: 11.185a-c, f, g. The citation of an old motif (which itself reflected and generated desire for the absent deceased: see Estrin (2016)) laces the emotion and existential meditation in the *lekythos* image with a fitting nostalgia.

They are also contingent: communing with death and the dead in this image is expressed as a lived experience, an intimacy between person and object that is driven by the impulse of survivors to remember and to create (a garland, perhaps, or a pot). The painted objects that come into being and degenerate simultaneously produce encounters with death by simulating its process, and point towards their creative foundations.

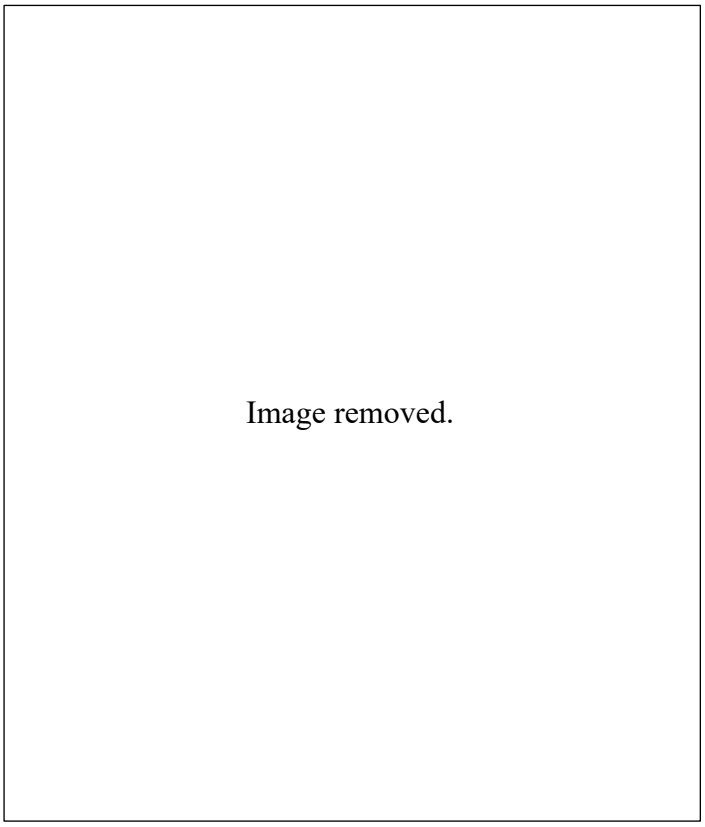


FIGURE 2.18

Lekythos (preparation to visit the grave).

Attic white-ground *lekythos*, attributed to the Painter of Athens 1826.

475-425 BCE.

Found in Greece (Euboea, Eretria).

National Museum, Athens: CC1641.

Photo: Oakley (2004: 46, fig. 16).

CONCLUSION

The symposium is not a space of death, but when its painted images make death their subject the tondo's circular field invites drinking subjects to introspection, absorption in a visual and conceptual profundity. For a man in his cups, sending his eye to the bottom of a wine-dark 'sea', thoughts go deep. In the event-driven context of a drinking cup (the symposium, a delimited period of multi-sensory delight), a moment of encounter with the pot's painted interior becomes infused with the ephemerality of finite experience. In addition, the combination of multiple visual fields, interior and exteriors, invites viewers and handlers to turn the object, to compare, connect and concoct its images, to engage with death as a temporal event and to participate in a metaphorical viewing that chimes with the mythological subject matter. Figures set in the distant past such as Ajax invite meditation on present mortality and future death: viewers see one (Phoenix) as another (Priam) and another (Phoenix) as the self, and transposability of identity reiterates an existential situation all viewers have in common.

Does it matter whether the figure on the Getty cup is, in fact, Ajax?[181] He is, after all, not named: the nude, bearded figure could be any male corpse. The sword is in an odd (even impossible) position for suicide, and some scholars have been confident that the male figure is Agamemnon.[182] The quarrel and voting scenes on

[181] This question is directed at a desire prevalent in the scholarship of classical art (and museum displays) to identify, label and categorise. It is also unclear that the woman is 'Tecmessa': Finglass (2011).
[182] See note 25.

the cup's exterior, admittedly, point in favour of Ajax, but the tondo itself is more suggestive than prescriptive.

What 'Ajax' brings, in the context of death, are specific mythological, political and religious connotations.[183] As an object of hero cult, his death is exceptional rather than ordinary, and there is a heightened significance to the materiality of his dead body, which will become a locus for continued influence and community attention. Moreover, as an eponymous hero, his name stands for a distinct group identity, one of the ten Athenian tribes.[184] But, on the other hand, the image's lack of specificity and the reverberation of associations across the multiple fields of the pot and its symposium context (Ajax, Achilles, Cleobulus; Phoenix, Priam, Anacreon), enable conceptual movement from the exemplary to the general. This sort of associative process has also been noted in Sophocles' later play, where Ajax's character is reminiscent of Homeric Achilles, Odysseus, and Hector, and inspires Odysseus, at least, to introspection, 'contemplating [Ajax's] predicament no more than [his] own'.[185]

But the Getty cup does more than participate in the formation of a concept of death; it also prompts reflection on the imaginative nature of existential meditation, making thought itself an object of contemplation. The suggested equivalence between categories of material object (corpse, pot) turns a spotlight on the process of extrapolation from singular perceptible examples to the general concept of death. But the picture of death that results is fraught with uncertainty: the falling veil, the

[183] Themes in archaic and classical Athenian reception of Ajax: Bocksberger (2022: 139-210).
[184] See for example Williams (1980).
[185] Soph. *Aj*. 124. Interchangeabilities and (im)possibilities of self-identification: Swift (2019); Roisman (2019).

pattern that fragments, nonsensical language, identities that merge and so are lost. In fact, the impossibility of knowing what dying is like is simply an urgent and anxiety-laden example of the challenges that underpin imaginative extrapolation of another's subjectivity and any generalized concept of experience. Humans are pot-like enigmas even to themselves.

Like drinking cups, *lekythoi* generate encounters with death and epistemological reflections upon them. However, the nature of these encounters and the processes by which they are crystallized are somewhat different. I will focus here on two points of contrast. First, in classical Athens at least, the grave (and the home, when preparations are made to visit the grave) *is* a site of death. Encounters with death through *lekythoi* are thus more immediate and targeted than they are through cups. Existential reflections emerge out of a situation of mourning the dead while interacting with objects (pots, wreaths, monuments). The emotional and sensory paradoxes (pleasure and pain, presence and absence, perceptibility and imperceptibility) that characterize encounters with lost loved ones are thus instrumental in processes of existential and epistemological reflection. This also means that, from the perspectives of viewers as mourners, encounters with death in response to *lekythoi* are largely defined by retrospection (in contrast to the shifting temporalities evoked by a cup, with its multiple fields and narrative scenes). But *lekythoi* also prompt more generalized reflection on death as a timeless concept. Where, on cups, the repetition of figure types and implicit associations between mythological characters prompt reflection on loss of identity, the sheer physical and visual abundance of *lekythoi*, real and painted, asserts a similar universality, and a similar anonymity, but in a more performative, immersive way.

This introduces my second point of contrast: does it matter that figures on *lekythoi* are *not* Ajax? One feature that makes *lekythoi* distinctive as a corpus of pots in the fifth century, and thus different from the cups that I explored in this chapter, is their (predominantly) real Athenian subject matter.[186] *Lekythoi* still invite comparisons, connections and concoctions, and one result is still a transposability of identity. But this figurative process operates less through myth, and more through an implicit mirroring between real viewers and figured images on the pots. As noted above, one seam of scholarship has proposed that the real-life content, especially the ubiquity of marginal figures such as women and children, reveals changing attitudes to death in Athens, and a growing interest in death as an individual event with a distinct afterlife.[187] More recently, Robin Osborne has argued that, in classical Athens, real life images operate as mirrors: images on pots increasingly share the world of their viewers.[188] This is all important, and suggests that attention in the fifth century turned towards situations (including funerary situations) closer to home.

However, as Osborne himself (and many others) emphasises, what matters is not just what was seen, but the way in which it was seen. One central claim of this chapter has been that the formal qualities of *lekythoi* (including a play of visual ontologies) combine with real life content to mimic a real-life context, generate

[186] There has been emphasis on the continuum in ancient Greece between myth and reality: 'real life scenes' are not replications of reality, but form part of a cultural imaginary. See, for example: Bérard *et al.* (1989), especially the chapter by Claude Bérard and Jean-Louis Durand; Ferrari (2003b). Note, especially, the presence on *lekythoi* of funerary scenes that combine myth with 'real life', such as images of Charon and Hypnos and Thanatos at the grave together with an Athenian figure. It is important to acknowledge the discursive frame within which real life scenes are also set because it galvanises their mediation of existential reflection. But the change in the subject matter that is chosen as the loam for that discussion remains significant.
[187] See note 161.
[188] See note 162.

existential encounters and frame them as imaginative. This draws on Nathaniel Jones's argument that, by putting pressure on the status of the image as an image, *lekythoi* painters not only sharpen an emotional encounter with someone that has gone, but also stage a more extensive epistemological problem.[189] Indeed, Jones' argument can be positioned within Richard Neer's version of the Greek revolution: Greek representational art, including images on pots, had long had a double impact on viewers (as both a likeness and presence), but the balance shifts towards the end of the archaic period towards a heightened interest in mimetic qualities.[190] This formal shift both facilitates and magnifies epistemological reflection. Elena Walter-Karydi has drawn a link between the advent of contrapposto in Greek sculpture and heightened meditation on the relationships between the living and the dead and, crucially, on the death of the self and the other.[191] Likewise, in the sepulchral world of *lekythoi*, death makes the same imaginative demands as ever but is visualised at greater remove.

Indeed, to flip the emphasis in Jones' article, epistemological reflections might encompass not just the status and use of images, but the relationship more generally between perception and reality, knowable and unknowable. This relationship is only put under more pressure the more familiar and apparently knowable the subject matter. Perhaps, then, as attention turns more closely upon one's own condition, including in and in response to an image, it also develops more epistemological anxiety. When existential reflection gets closer to home, it becomes more acute. If

[189] See note 133.
[190] Neer (2002), (2010). See further note 162.
[191] See note 46 on page 28 together with Walter-Karydi (2015: 144-50).

the scene on a pot is a mirror, that mirror is set assertively within a painted terracotta frame.

Another bigger picture story here is that *both* these pot types engage in a philosophy that is not unlike Plato's project in the *Phaedo*.[192] This seems especially true of *lekythoi* which, like a Platonic dialogue, generate existential reflection out of a scene from real life (mourning the dead; discussion amongst friends). But Plato's Socrates' exemplary death also taps into a tradition of the beautiful dead, the exceptional figure that wins immortal renown though his death, and, in that respect, may also build on existential meditations at the symposium.[193]

[192] See note 133.
[193] Sarpedon's death (for example) is more obviously relevant here. Ajax's suicide is shameful and not heroic; it is not a beautiful death. Though see Wilson (2007: esp. 1-8) on a mixed response to Socrates' execution by suicide, which is also, by some accounts, shameful.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EXTRAORDINARY DEATH OF SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*

> ὦ παῖδες, ἥκει τῷδ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θέσφατος
> βίου τελευτή, κοὐκέτ' ἔστ' ἀποστροφή.
>
> Children, there has come upon this man, as ordained by god,
> the end of his life, and there is no longer any turning back.
> Oedipus speaking about himself, in Sophocles, *OC* 1472-73.

Greek tragedy is renowned for its bloody themes. Characters frequently die gruesomely, miserably, in war, by suicide, by murder, by divine justice… But the moment of a character's death, the switch from living to dead, usually happens off stage, absent and unseen; what is shown to the audience instead is the build-up and aftermath, not the event.[1]

In this respect, ancient tragedy seems at first to have missed an opportunity. Presence is a defining feature of the genre by comparison with other contemporary media: philosophy, pots, sculpture, historiography. When it comes to representations of dying people it is difficult to think of a more 'present' genre than one that involves actual bodies.[2] As introduced in the previous chapter, corporality goes hand in hand with death: it is of the body (the mortal body) to deteriorate, die and decay.[3] This is accepted even in philosophical arguments for *immortality*: the

[1] This absence might be explained by reference to a convention in tragedy as to representation of violence more generally: see Seidensticker and Vöhler (2006). Even so, the frequent (but not ubiquitous) absence of death from the tragic stage shapes encounters with it.
[2] Compare Budelmann (2006: 136-37, 141) on the key role played by the presence of an acting body in representations of pain on the tragic stage, and also Goldhill (2006: 154) on the explosive combination of violence with real bodies in the theatre.
[3] Embodiment, materiality and death: see note 6 on page 80.

soul may survive; bodies normally do not. Tragedy makes use of bodies in death's build-up and aftermath (possibly via some sort of corpse substitute in the latter). But the event itself, the extinguishing of life, is remarkably disembodied, communicated by retrospective description or synchronous voices from behind the stage building.[4] Herakles, his pre-death agonies a visual spectacle, does not actually die on stage (at least not in any way that can be extracted from the text of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*).[5] Expiration in full view, such as that of Alcestis and Hippolytus, is unusual (at least in the extant corpus).[6]

In this chapter, I examine some ways in which Greek tragedy does offer audience members encounters with the event of death. I am interested here, as elsewhere, primarily in death as *dying*, the end-point of life's linear progression.[7] How close does tragedy take us? How does a medium that might show physical bodies 'dying' onstage in fact communicate their death?[8] Composers and audiences of tragedy do seem interested in that moment; accounts home in with graphic detail on the final moments of the dying. Consider Aeschylus' Clytemnestra's description of Agamemnon's dying throes or Sophocles' Messenger's description of Haimon's suicide upon the body of Antigone.[9] But encounters with those moments are characterised by a distinctive sort of phantasy (via memory and narrative

[4] On displacement of the suffering body in Greek tragedy, its place in a literary tradition of embodiment only in wounding and death and attempts to avoid that embodiment through language: Murnaghan (1988).
[5] See Goldhill (2012: 262-63) on the advantages of referring to Sophocles' written work as a 'script'. I refer here to the 'text', but it is an impossible entity. As Simon Goldhill observes, a reading of the script is a performance. In any given re-incarnation of the script of *Women of Trachis* Herakles might be understood to die. It is, however, not stated explicitly in the words.
[6] Eur. *Alc.* 391: 'farewell!'; Eur. *Hipp.* 1458: 'Cover my face as quickly as you can with my cloak!'.
[7] See note 13 on page 10 and pages 52-62.
[8] Of course, the bodies on stage are the bodies of actors, who represent the characters. They thus could and should not actually die. Perhaps the presence of real bodies in the theatre is an encumbrance.
[9] Aesch. *Ag.* 1382-92; Soph. *Ant.* 1234-43.

experience) and so are different from what they might be like were those events shown on stage. Before death, characters, including dying characters, are present body and soul, but the actual moment of death is physically absent; the 'presence' of that moment, a future moment, is crystallised instead by the anticipations of minds within the drama and amongst the audience. The moment itself may be communicated by offstage cries, or real-time reporting, again engaging the audience's imaginative faculties. In the aftermath, evidence of death (dead bodies, for example) might be present, but the moment has passed; the instance of dying might be communicated by a retrospective account from a third party.[10] The question is therefore not whether we encounter death in Greek tragedy at all, but what those encounters are like: how do we come to encounter death, and what sort of epistemological meditations on the challenges of imagining death do these tragic encounters provoke?[11]

I focus on one play: Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (the *OC*). As a drama in which an old man, Oedipus, arrives at the land in which his life will end,[12] this is a good play for thinking about dying and death. In particular, Oedipus provides a powerful exemplum of the relationship between bodily presence and death. Visible for most of the play, he leaves the stage at 1555 for his death and completely vanishes at his life's completion (transition into death or heroism or both; what happens is unclear). Then, as is common in Greek tragedy, his death and disappearance are

[10] See especially Bassi (2018: 37-38): 'The result is a paradoxical situation in which empirical observation (the sight of the dead body) only confirms what the observer cannot know (the state of being dead) […] As a distinctive feature of Greek tragedy, [the *ekkyklêma*] gives prominence to the material presence of the corpse in the service of concealing the moment of death'.
[11] On fifth-century drama as a form of early Greek philosophical thought, see Billings (2021: esp. ch. 2).
[12] What happens to Oedipus at the end of the play has been extensively debated, as I address below.

communicated by a Messenger. This format puts pressure on what is perceptible and imperceptible, knowable and unknowable, about death. It also puts a question mark over the extent to which what *is* perceptible is helpful: what difference might it make to see Oedipus' body during (or, indeed, after) his death? Insofar as this play stages the build-up to death but sends the moment behind the scenes, it can stand (somewhat) for the genre. It is a good choice of play for thinking not just about dying and death, but about tragic encounters with them.

It is also a curious choice. In the first place, there are several factors that make Oedipus' death unusual, both in general and by comparison with the genre: death in old age, a notional conclusion to life rather than the brutal interruption (murder or suicide) found in other dramas;[13] the foreknowledge that the dying man has of his coming demise; the disappearance of his body and absence of his corpse (and thus the lost opportunity for mourning). Can an unusual death reveal anything about tragic dying, or dying in general? Admittedly, the exemplarity of any one tragedy for a varied genre is always questionable.[14] It is therefore, arguably, better to select a play that is apposite and by the unexpected to throw light upon what is expected, turning a distinctive tragedy into a suggestive exemplum for how a genre deals with death (the more so because, composed and performed at the end of the fifth century, this play was in a position to reflect on almost a century of drama, by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, among others).[15]

[13] The fact that Sorana-Cristina Man's study of death in Greek tragedy focuses wholly on violence seems indicative of this point: Man (2020). See further Reinhardt (1979: 224) on death as painful tearing from life in *Antigone* and *Ajax*.
[14] On exemplarity and our reception of the classical world, see note 29 on page 19. See further Goldhill (2012: 140-65) on what is at stake in seeking an abstract notion of 'the tragic' and generalising about tragedy. When I use 'tragic' in this chapter, I mean 'pertaining to a Greek tragedy'.
[15] See especially Van Nortwick (2015: 1-6, 81-114, 115-24) on 'late Sophocles'. See further Ringer (1998: 90-99) on Sophocles' daring and self-consciousness in the *OC*; Markantonatos (2007: 21-

But in addition, and more interesting for the purposes of this thesis, the questionable exemplarity of this play as a model for what it might more generally be like to die in tragedy invites members of its audience to confront the tenability of their expectations surrounding *any* one death. Is any individual's example transferable? Is there any such thing as an 'ordinary death' in *or outside* tragedy? Or might every death be idiosyncratic? This question compromises extrapolations of what death is and is like from observation of a dying person. It is a question that might crop up in any genre,[16] but which seems especially pertinent in the tragic theatre, where mythical individuals such as Oedipus might have exemplary force, and where a tragic performance might stand as a source of instruction to, and thus exert normative influence over, the Athenian *polis*.[17]

Does Oedipus even die (in an ordinary sense)? Details in Sophocles' drama indicate that Oedipus' death will be far from ordinary, that he is destined to become the object of hero cult and so to remain present amongst the living and exert his influence upon them. This complicates our understanding of what happens to him when he disappears. Does he become a hero after or upon his death, or even over the course of the play (what is the existential status of a hero anyway?)?[18] Or does he somehow transcend his mortal existence without dying at all (is death reserved

30) on Sophocles' art and last play; Nooter (2012: ch. 5) on the sonic exceptionality of the *OC* and its place at the end of the fifth century; Van Nortwick (2012) on late Sophoclean heroes and the dramatist's 'farewell to his art'. Knox (1964: 144) comments, 'This play is a worthy last will and testament. All the great themes of the earlier plays recur; it is as if Sophocles were summing up a lifetime of thought and feeling in this demonic work of his old age.'

[16] See chapter five, for example.

[17] See note 14 above. On Oedipus' 'exemplary' death: Scodel (1984: 118). On drama as a source of instruction to the *polis*, see Ar. *Ran.* 686-87, 1008-12. See further Pucci (2007); Valakas (2009: 201-6). Note the comparative absence of death (as opposed to the dead) in Old Comedy; death is important to the genre of tragedy.

[18] The timing of a hero's recognition as such might also complicate matters here. On hero cult, see Méautis (1940: 9-24). Heroes were human beings subject to human ethical standards: Blundell (1989: 254).

for those who do not become heroes?)? Much scholarship has circled around the nature of Oedipus' transition to and ultimate possession of cult hero status.[19] Surely, then, the *OC* is at best bewildering, at worst irrelevant, for thinking about death? What I hope to demonstrate is that it is precisely this uncertainty that, combined with the features detailed above, makes the *OC* a productive case study for this thesis. Even if Oedipus does not die, the lack of clarity surrounding what happens to him, his new ontological status and the way in which he reaches it, sheds light not only upon the expectations that surround death but upon an epistemological problem. If Oedipus' death *is* extraordinary, what does that reveal about the alternative: what would it take for his death to be considered ordinary? Moreover, could the mystery that shrouds what it might mean to be and become a hero simply be emblematic of a larger existential problem: what can the living know about any ontological situation beyond existence? I will not explore Oedipus' heroic status further here: hero cult has monopolised scholarship on this play. Instead, I will

[19] See, for example, Rohde (1925: 430-31); Méautis (1940: 37-51); Rosenmeyer (1952: esp. 104-11); Linforth (1954: 97-104, 184-85), though he emphasises that Oedipus dies and that heroization is, for him, an 'empty thing'; Knox (1964: 58) on the *OC* as a mystery play about Oedipus' transition; Bowra (1965: 307-55, esp. 342); Burian (1974) on how the double suppliant drama format dramatizes a political heroization of Oedipus on stage, paving the way for his daemonic heroization; Reinhardt (1979: 193-94); Henrichs (1983: 93-100), (1993: 176-78); Birge (1984); Kearns (1989: 50-52, 189, 208-9); Lardinois (1992); Calame (1998); Wilson (1997: 178-86); Scullion (2000: 231-32); Markantonatos (2002); Ferrari (2003a); Tilg (2004a) on chthonic symbolism in the play; Bowman (2007) on how Oedipus' curse effects his metamorphosis into a hero (a source of comfort to an Athenian audience at the end of the fifth century); Currie (2012) on Oedipus' simultaneous status as Sophoclean tragic hero and cultic hero (with Sophocles dramatizing a '*process* of transformation'); Garvie (2016: 75-82). Note especially Hester (1977: 31-32), who observes 'most of the instances show that the power of a dead hero comes precisely from being dead'. Critical to this question is the reading of the Messenger's words at *OC* 1583-84: ὡς λελοιπότα | κεῖνον τὸν ἀεὶ βίοτον ἐξεπίστασο. The scholiast accepted the λελοιπότα that is in the manuscripts, citing Homer. Many scholars instead accept Mudge's emendation to λελογχότα (he 'obtained' his immortal life): see for example Wilamowitz (1917: 366); Kamerbeek (1984: 216); Dawe (1996); Avezzù and Guidorizzi (2008: 372). As regards a real cult and tomb of Oedipus at Colonus, I follow Scott Scullion in thinking that this was most likely a 'dramatic postulate' (2000: 232). In any case, what matters for the purposes of this chapter is the death of Oedipus encountered in Sophocles' play; it is possible that, even in the fifth century, this encounter would have been reinforced by external knowledge, but the evidence post-dates the *OC* (see, for example, Androtion *FGrH* 324 F 62, though, as Felix Jacoby comments, it is unclear which part belongs to Androtion and the idea of the tomb is complicated (IIIb Supp. vol. 1, 169 and vol. 2, 155, n. 5)).

focus upon how Sophocles' drama provokes encounters with death and raises epistemological questions: the very fact that Sophocles' dramatic account of the end of Oedipus' life has equivocal value as an example of one death, tragic death or death in general, throws the epistemological problems that surround death into sharper relief.

The chapter falls into three parts. In my first part, I study a scene in which there is a gear change in expectation, a shift from awareness to dread when Oedipus' death becomes imminent, and a discernible splitting of perspectives as the dying man diverges from the living in knowledge and trajectory. Next, I discuss the Messenger's speech, in which the ekphrastic set-up brings ideas of distance to the fore. Finally, in a part that doubles as a conclusion, I delve into some attributes of Oedipus' death that put pressure on its potentially exemplary force: to what extent might an audience derive general ideas about what death is and is like from this play? This question is entwined with the relationship between the exemplarity of Sophocles' Oedipus' death and our reception of Oedipus and *Oedipus* as significant (from a death perspective) within the specific context of the play, the tragic, classical Athens, or indeed more universally for audiences then, now and in between. In each case, my starting point is the language of the script, though, throughout, what might and might not be present and visible on stage is important.[20] My overall point is that existential reflection through Sophocles' Oedipus is epistemologically problematic; encountering Oedipus' death is characterised by distance and exteriority, and the tension between ordinariness and extraordinariness

[20] On extrapolating the 'dramatized visible event' from the script, see Taplin (2003: 1-6).

that defines him as a tragic figure has implications for a more philosophical question as to the relationship between one death and a general experience.

CRISIS

Let us turn first to a scene towards the end of the play in which there is a pronounced shift in expectation (1456-1555): Oedipus' death suddenly becomes imminent. The scene mostly involves Oedipus, Antigone and the chorus (Theseus joins towards the end), and unfolds in the interval between the exit of Polynices and the exit of Oedipus with his daughters and Theseus. Threefold thunder crashes (1456, 1463-64, 1478-79) and blazing flashes of lightning (1466-67) fulfil the thunder or lightning of Zeus that, earlier in the play, Oedipus said had been entrusted to him by Apollo as signs of the turning point of his life (94-95).[21] For Oedipus and the audience, at least, it is now probable that the moment of Oedipus' death is close.[22]

It is through the chorus, primarily, that Sophocles orchestrates the advent of a crisis in the drama.[23] The sensory explosion precipitates an emotional explosion, reflecting and reinforcing a widespread realisation that something significant is imminent. The chorus speak of thunder crashing and resounding and light flashes blazing (1456, 1463-64, 1466-67, 1478-79) and fear's touch as it assails the ends of the hairs on their heads (1464-65). Their heart cowers (ἔπταξα θυμόν, 1466), a

[21] An earthquake does not transpire, though the Messenger later speculates that something of that sort might have occurred (1661-62).
[22] See especially Linforth (1954: 168-69): *this* is the moment when the audience know that the death will occur during the time span of the play. Suggesting that the audience already know the tragedy's outcome in the first scene: Wilamowitz (1917: 329).
[23] This sort of heightened moment, especially as a point of sudden change, might provoke the sublime: see Porter (2016: 53) on the crisis or *kairos*. See note 103.

decisive, physical shrinking within that also bursts out in repeated cries that are expressively fervent: ἔα ἔα (1478) … ἰὼ ἰώ (1492). The intensity of their emotional reaction to the sensory assault reflects their heightened expectation of a dreadful event.[24]

The audience's apprehension of the dramatic event is, in turn, built upon vicarious adoption of the chorus' experience (communicated by the chorus' words, animated metrical rhythms, and movements on stage). This vicarious experience is reinforced by direct reaction to the choral spectacle (which is to say, the audience, and indeed Theseus, at once responds with and to the chorus) and, conceivably, staging effects such as rolls of thunder.[25] Fulfilling the prophecy that the audience, Antigone and possibly the Eumenides heard from Oedipus at 94-95,[26] the theatrical climax taken as a whole represents and generates an amplification of mental vision for all parties. Attitudes towards Oedipus' death shift from awareness of its possibility (he is an old wandering man seeking rest from his journey) to expectation of its imminence, a leap forwards on a sliding scale towards proximity and presence.[27]

However, Oedipus is still alive and the moment of death remains absent. The confident foreknowledge of death that is realised by the audience and Oedipus is thus a strong visualisation of a future event, an imaginative encounter, of sorts, with

[24] Wallace (1979: 46) argues that 'interruption of the ordinary flow of events' by death is characteristic of Greek tragedy; here, Oedipus is not yet dead, but 'jolts' in reality communicate the proximity of that moment.
[25] Theseus' words on entering the stage draw attention to this aural phenomenon: he responds first to the 'common sound' from both chorus and Oedipus, and then immediately asks whether there is a thunderbolt or the noisy impact of rainy hail, hinting that he hears one in the other (*OC* 1500-4). On the possibility that the chorus themselves performed the thunder: Gardiner (1987: 115). Others propose a thunder-machine: see Edmunds (1996: 75); Avezzù and Guidorizzi (2008) on 1456.
[26] Jebb (2004a) on 1474 emphasises that only Antigone heard Oedipus.
[27] See note 110.

the moment itself. This sort of mental experience ordinarily only accompanies unnatural death: Hippolytus' fatal injury, Ajax's suicide, Iphigenia's impending sacrifice, or, in Oedipus' case, the hand of fate.[28] Though unnatural death and the associated anticipation of its proximity (when and where it will occur) are not the norm for mortals, they are ordinary for tragedy. It is not that characters in tragedy never die in ignorance or uncertainty,[29] but rather that when major characters such as Oedipus die, representations of their death are overshadowed by grim certainty: life's end is recognised to be close, inexorable, definite; it drags them down with dreadful magnetism.[30] This is reflected in the language with which Oedipus explains to Theseus the significance of the thunder and lightning (1508-9):

> ῥοπὴ βίου μοι· καί σ' ἅπερ ξυνήνεσα
> θέλω πόλιν τε τήνδε μὴ ψεύσας θανεῖν.
>
> This is the turn of the scales of my life, and I wish to die
> without disappointing you and this city of the things that I agreed to grant.

When Oedipus talks of the turning point of his life (ῥοπὴ βίου μοι, 1508) the imagery he uses of sinking scales communicates a downwards momentum in counterpart to the 'overturning' (καταστροφήν, 103) that he begged from the Eumenides at the start of the play (the prefix κατα- has overtones of downwards motion).[31] The image of Hades as 'below' and death as a descent is a familiar one

[28] This might suggest he is already on the route to becoming a hero: his death (or transformation) is not ordinary.
[29] I pass over descriptions of war casualties such as in Aeschylus' *Persians* where, though characters are named, their life is over in a few words and so conjoins the instant of the audience's knowledge with the surprise of sudden death.
[30] The 'dark "necessity"' of death, 'language of tragic inevitability' and the 'fated day': Segal (1993: ch. 4, esp. 56-57). See further Segal (1992a: 217-19). Charles Segal argues in both that *Alcestis* provides a rare account of a 'normal death'. On my reading here, however, the grim certainty that Alcestis has of her death before it occurs makes her death comparable to that of other characters in Greek tragedy. It may not be a violent death, but as a substitution for Admetus' death it is not normal. See pages 196-98 on the questionable normality of any death.
[31] Jebb (2004a) on 1508 also notes the momentum in this word.

in Greek literature,[32] and will return in the Messenger's speech, but it is worth noting here because it is an important way in which the absent future, Oedipus' death, becomes mentally present. It also reflects one way in which the encounter with Oedipus' death is positioned as both ordinary and extraordinary, somewhat familiar and somewhat unfamiliar within the genre and the ambit of mortal experience. I will return to this duality in my conclusion.

The certainty of death that accompanies the final countdown is potent, so powerful, in fact, that edges blur between expectation of Oedipus' death and occurrence of the event itself. For Oedipus, long-fated death 'has come' (ἥκει, 1472) upon him with the fulfilment of the promised signs; in knowledge of his imminent death, in accordance with his lot, he is already dead.[33] What might be amusing in another genre and time—'Now am I dead, | Now am I fled…' (Pyramus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* V.I)—is serious in Greek tragedy, where the nature of the deaths permits advance certainty and appreciation of death's onset. For Oedipus, the end of his story is expanded into a significant final day, allowing, paradoxically, for imperfective experience of a perfective moment:[34] the end is an instant that can only

[32] Tragedy: Soph. *Ant.* 895-96; Eur. *Alc.* 360 and 393-94; Eur. *Hipp.* 1447; Eur. *Hec.* 206-10; Eur. fr. 638 (Loeb 506). Lyric: Anac. fr. 395 *PMG*. Indeed, one Greek word for dying is to die 'downwards' (thoroughly, away): καταθνήσκω.

[33] This sort of language can be observed elsewhere in Greek tragedy. Alcestis, once her 'fated day' (*Alc.* 147) arrives, is dead before her death: 'you might call her both living and dying' (*Alc.* 141). Ironically, Admetus will experience the same plight: *Alc.* 241-43. Still speaking, still with more to say, she insists 'existing no longer, you would say I am nothing' (*Alc.* 387, see also 390). Likewise, with Deianeira dead indoors and dying Herakles on his way, the chorus of *Women of Trachis* do not know whom they should mourn, for 'it is the same thing to see and to wait to see' (*Trach.* 952).

[34] On perfective and imperfective time in Sophocles, and on the contrast between Oedipus' imperfective wandering from day to day and the perfective accomplishment of his life on 'this day' (*OC* 1612), see Hutchinson (1999: 58-63). On the significant 'final day' in Greek literature, marking confident recognition by a character of a decisive moment defined by the end of one state and beginning of another, see Herrero de Jäuregui (2013: esp. 62). Though, as Miguel Herrero de Jäuregui explores, the phrase in Greek tragedy is overshadowed by the possibility that characters are mistaken or deceived. On Sophocles' gods 'offering a future that is uncertain': Budelmann (2000a: 194). See further Parker (1999: 27): 'As mortals we see the Sophoclean gods through a glass darkly'.

ordinarily be experienced by living observers since the dying, once death occurs, no longer exist to observe the moment's completion.

Oedipus' reference to himself in the third person, as 'this man' (τῷδε […] ἀνδρί, 1472), contributes to this effect. To some extent, the phrasing simply adds grandeur and cosmic significance to the moment by suggesting that the words are spoken not just by Oedipus, but by a god, the voice of fate.[35] But the phrasing also sets Oedipus implicitly outside himself. This is an out-of-body experience of sorts, a formulation that, though anachronistic, points towards a real sense in which Oedipus' language reflects a divide between the living, who respond, and the dead or dying that are the object of that discourse, and yet allows him, unusually, to straddle both.

The situation of the dying Oedipus, an existence in a temporal suspension with a downward momentum, is a source of perplexity for the living. It is apparent that he, the one who will die, sees and knows what is to come with greater clarity than those who observe him.[36] Though the chorus (who were not yet on stage during Oedipus' prayer at 84-110, and so did not hear the prophecy) respond to the celestial portents with dread, their fear is laced with uncertainty. Will Zeus cast a bolt from the sky portending misfortune (1468-70)? Will divine power bring 'something wrapped in

[35] Long (1968: 89) comments that the impersonal phrase 'shows that events are now beyond human control'. There is a similarly jarring effect later in the Messenger's speech when the god seems to speak both to and with Oedipus, 'Oh this man, this man, Oedipus, why are we delaying our departure…?' (1627-28). The use of οὗτος here is usually interpreted as emphatic deixis, giving the god's words an intimate tone; on this sort of deictic in Sophocles, see Ruijgh (2006: 151-63).

[36] This more extensive knowledge gives irony a lesser role: Buxton (1995: 18). The opposition in the play between Oedipus' visuality (on stage) and obscurity (through his different knowledge): Edmunds (1996: 46). Sir Maurice Bowra comments on the different perspectives in this scene and elsewhere in the play, but focuses upon mortal ignorance in the face of the divine: Bowra (1965: 344-46). Markantonatos (2002: 124-25) makes a similar point (though he suggests that the perspectives begin to converge); see further Markantonatos (2007: 107-8). Charles Segal also observes, 'Where the others are confused, [Oedipus] is calm': Segal (1981: 396).

darkness' (τι … ἀφεγγές, 1480-81) upon the earth (1480-81), even upon them… (1482-84)?[37] It is only following Oedipus' explanation that they pray with reverent certainty of his death (1556-78). Even Antigone, who was on stage during Oedipus' prayer and must have overheard something to prompt her to respond 'be silent!' (σίγα, 111), cannot comprehend the signs. In response to Oedipus' (correctly) confident interpretation that the thunder signifies 'the end of life that was prophesied' (θέσφατος | βίου τελευτή, 1472-73) and that there is no longer any 'turning it back' or 'turning away' (ἀποστροφή, 1473), she asks 'How do you know? What leads you to this knowledge?' (πῶς οἶσθα; τῷ δὲ τοῦτο συμβαλὼν ἔχεις; 1474). Oedipus diverges from those around him in understanding.[38]

Moreover, with lucidity of insight comes remarkable clarity of sight: Oedipus alone, it appears, recognises the presence of the two divinities that lead him to Hades (1547-48). His privileged perspective reflects a bifurcation of living and dying vision.[39] His dying powers of sight seem more than metaphorical; his clarity of sight is like a god's.[40] In a reversal that positions Oedipus as not just in control of the situation and those around him, but actually adopting the role of divine escort, he turns from blind follower to solemn guide as he is led from the stage by gods that only he can see (1542-48).

[37] Nooter (2012: 173) also notes this contrast between the chorus' fear and Oedipus' certainty.
[38] See Dunn (1992: 4-5) on another reversal in dramatic irony at the beginning of the drama (blind Oedipus' recognition of the setting before the audience).
[39] There is a similar bifurcation in Eur. *Alc.* 259-62, when Admetus' wife describes the physical appearance of Hades and asks the chorus 'don't you see him?' (οὐχ ὁρᾶις;). On her dying perspective: Segal (1992a: 229-30); Sekita (2022: 43-45). See further *Alc.* 252-57; *Hipp.* 1447.
[40] A near comparison is Apollo's sight in Euripides' *Alcestis* (and Alcestis' sight later in the drama: see note 39); Apollo not only sees but converses with Death, exclaiming, 'I am looking upon Death right here beside me' (24).

The divergence in Oedipus' perception and understanding raises epistemological problems for those that observe him: the combination of clear sight with dark vision also whispers of cognitive unreliability. Oedipus' eyes have always been dark: for him, light is lightless (φῶς ἀφεγγές, 1549), and its final rays must be felt not seen (νῦν δ' ἔσχατόν σου τοὐμὸν ἅπτεται δέμας, 1550). He presents an extreme, and perverse, version of the dying warrior, who, in Greek epic, gains a prophetic insight precisely at his most vulnerable, as his sensory organs fail.[41] The blindness that has defined Oedipus and heralded his identity from the start of the play must somewhat undermine the trust that others might place in his insight: how is anyone to believe and to follow a formerly helpless old man, who needed a young girl for guidance and protection?[42] From the outside perspective of the living, the divergent vision of the dying appears at once more perceptive and less sound.

Thus, in this critical scene, Oedipus' death seems more visible, more palpable, and the anticipation of those that observe him rises in excitement and dread. But with greater proximity comes a splitting of comprehension and vision. In the final moratorium between certainty that death will occur and expiration, the dying diverge from the living on a downwards trajectory, knowing differently and seeing differently, often (linguistically at least) already dead. But in a drama where the unexpected realisation of crisis is signalled by the intrusion of unmistakeable cosmic force, *all* parties sense in their different ways the imminence of something

[41] Compare Alcestis' description of how her 'dark' or 'obscure' 'eye' or 'sight' 'is oppressed' (βαρύνεται, 385). Compare: *Alc.* 269 and *Hipp.* 1444.

[42] See, for example, Knox (1964: 145): 'To cast an old man in the role of the hero was a bold step, and of all old men in the world this Oedipus is surely the least likely candidate.' Though this interpretation conflicts with a major thrust in scholarship, which sees this contrast as the point of the play: Oedipus' transformation from blind human to cult hero. See note 19. See further Nooter (2012: ch. 5) on Oedipus' 'strong poetic presence' for much of the *OC*; Oedipus' lyric voice gives him authority and power.

significant: the chorus with their heightened emotions; Oedipus' with his divergent perspective. This seems to be the sort of 'intensifying of perception' that James Porter considers to be characteristic of the sublime (here, perhaps, its advent).[43] The bifurcation of sight, knowledge and existence corresponds with a separation of the dead from the living, a process and event that is both momentous and mysterious.

A Messenger's Account: Something Wondrous

> ἄνδρες πολῖται, ξυντομωτάτως μὲν ἄν
> τύχοιμι λέξας Οἰδίπουν ὀλωλότα·
> ἃ δ' ἦν τὰ πραχθέντ' οὔθ' ὁ μῦθος ἐν βραχεῖ
> φράσαι πάρεστιν οὔτε τἄργ' ὅσ' ἦν ἐκει.
>
> Men of the polis, I could say,
> most briefly, that Oedipus is dead,
> but as for what happened, there is no account that could tell it briefly
> and the many actions that transpired there could not be told in a few words.
>
> The Messenger, *OC* 1579-82

At the end of the scene just discussed, Oedipus leaves the stage with Theseus, Antigone and Ismene. After a brief interlude from the chorus in which they pray for a painless death for 'the stranger' (1556-78),[44] the Messenger enters to give his account of Oedipus' death (1579-1666). This is the scene to which we now turn.

Something remarkable about Sophocles' choice to represent Oedipus' death by verbal description is not that it is unusual, but that it is the norm for Greek tragedy. As observed in the introduction to this chapter, death happens to bodies, and

[43] Porter (2016: 54). See note 103.
[44] Kamerbeek (1984: 214) on 1568-73 observes that the chorus sing of what is happening (off stage and so unseen) in terms of a *katabasis*; Avezzù and Guidorizzi (2008: 367) talks of the ode's conclusive tone, bridging the time before and after the death.

tragedy, unlike many other representational media, can use real bodies. Though rare, there are tragedies in which a character dies on stage; showing the death, not telling the death, *is* an option. The ekphrastic presentation of Oedipus' death is therefore a formal choice and, intentionally or not, frames Oedipus' death in terms of distance and exteriority: these are hallmarks of ekphrasis, of which the messenger report is a classic tragic example.[45] Though familiarity with the messenger speech format might limit the extent to which it is noticeable in any one play, that format still defines how members of the audience interact with the scene and their encounters with the death described. Indeed, though the prism through which I approach this discussion is death, it is notable that the ekphrastic format *per se* of tragic messenger speeches has been an underexplored topic, though ekphrastic features (distance, vividity, perspective, and so on) have been discussed under different aegises. The narrative qualities of the speeches (especially questions of focalisation) have been thoroughly explored,[46] for example, and there have also been targeted studies of descriptions of objects and art more generally in tragedy.[47] More recently, these two threads have been brought closer in cognitive approaches to tensions of immersion and distance in ancient narrative (including in tragic

[45] See pages 10-11 and notes 14 and 62 on pages 10 and 34.
[46] Markantonatos (2002: 130-47) is important here; his book-length study of narrative in the *OC* includes a detailed section on the Messenger's speech. On narrative and tragic messenger speeches, see further de Jong (1991); Barrett (2002). On narrative in / narratology 'of' tragedy more generally, see Roberts (1989); Goward (1999); Lowe (2000: 157-87); Gould (2001: 319-34); Markantonatos (2002); de Jong (2004), (2006), (2007); Grethlein and Rengakos (2009: pt. 4), especially the chapter by Francis Dunn.
[47] See for example Steiner (2001); Zeitlin (2009); Stieber (2011).

messenger speeches).[48] The latter studies form a key backdrop to the discussion that follows immediately below.[49]

This part of the chapter falls into two halves. I begin with a consideration of the messenger speech as a representation, a substitute for a missed experience (presence at the scene described). I then consider the messenger speech as an artefact in its own right: turning our eyes away from the story and towards the painting (as it were), to what extent does the Messenger's presentation of the events as 'something wondrous' (κἀποθαυμάσαι πρέπον, 1586) generate encounters not just with Oedipus' death but with death more generally?[50] Distance is an important theme throughout, but where the first frames it in terms of immersion and subjectivity (familiar terms from recent approaches to tragic narrative), the second does so in terms of the object—Oedipus' death becomes an object of attention.

Oedipus' death is multiply distant. At a macro level, it is not only represented by a verbal substitute (his acting dying body is absent from the stage), but is also reported after the event: the audience (and chorus) are not just missing, but have already missed, the death. The spatial and temporal absences of Oedipus' dying body are all the more stark for the fact that his living body has been so persistently

[48] See especially Budelmann and van Emde Boas (2020). For bibliography on tensions of immersion and distance, see note 19 on page 45. See further Rijksbaron (2006) on the presence and function of historic presents in Sophocles and Euripides (reading some of these as unaugmented imperfects might re-shape the immersive qualities of a messenger speech): the ὁρῶμεν in *OC* 1654, for example, could be either, with the present tense communicating greater immediacy as the Messenger turns his attention upon the man that he can see (Theseus) as opposed to the one that he cannot.

[49] On issues of epistemology and authority in tragic messenger speeches, see Barrett (2002: esp. 190-222).

[50] See Elsner (2002: 2) on description of art as a specific (and major) ancient genre of ekphrasis. Emphasis on ancient ekphrasis as a broader category than its modern definition (description of a work of art) is correct but perhaps, in eagerness to rectify a simplistic narrowness, fails to appreciate its merits. Since ekphrasis makes a verbal artefact of its subject (of any sort) and conjures an experience of looking at that artefact, it is, to some extent, 'description as of a work of art'.

present until now.[51] He has been on stage for 1555 verses (since the opening scene), and leaves the stage with the sole purpose of dying somewhere unseen and unknown to all mortals apart from Theseus.[52] The contrast between the staging of this scene and the rest of the play up to this point intensifies awareness of Oedipus' absence; he has departed from the performance as from life. If the same actor that played Oedipus also played the Messenger this effect might be compounded.[53] This could work in either direction: for some members of the audience, the familiar body and voice might collapse distance and enable deeper immersion (when the Messenger quotes Oedipus, for example). But, to the extent that members of the audience did notice the repetition, the re-entrance of the same acting body after a brief interlude (22 verses from the chorus) might heighten awareness of Oedipus' absence by presenting a difference.[54] In what he is (a different character) as much as in what

[51] Note the remarks upon Oedipus' appearance by characters who visit him: 75-76 (the stranger); 140-41 (the chorus); 327 (Ismene); 555-56 (Theseus); 1255-63 (Polynices). In addition, the motivation in several scenes concerns what to do with his body, which is a source of interest, fear and desire, an object to be manipulated, positioned and owned: the Chorus worry where he should sit and, for a while, ask him to leave; Ismene reveals that the Thebans plan to control his body outside the Cadmean land; Oedipus offers his body to Theseus as a source of protection and asks for sanctuary; Creon comes to abduct his body; Oedipus demands that no one touch his body or look upon his death or corpse. Other than Oedipus, Antigone is only absent between 846 and 1099 and the Chorus (as is normal) remain onstage from 117. On the foregrounding of Oedipus' living body on stage in the *OC* (arguing that, insofar as his body is not in pain, this attention is unusual not just in tragedy but in Greek culture), see Murnaghan (1988). Oedipus' seated position on stage and visuality as a central and authoritative figure: Budelmann (2000b: 188). On the transformation of space in the theatre by acting bodies: Rehm (2002: ch. 4).

[52] The impact of his departure is significant: the scholiast comments, 'the most essential moment in the drama' (τὸ συνεκτικώτατον τοῦ δράματος) (Xenis (2018)). Kirkwood (1994: 97) observes the impressive impact; Winnington-Ingram (1980: 253) calls it 'the greatest *coup de théâtre* in Sophocles'; Jebb (2004a: 238) notes 'A more splendid dramatic effect than Sophocles has created here could hardly be conceived'; Van Nortwick (2012: 141) goes further, 'one of the great exits in Western theater'. Moreover, Oedipus has been connected musically and emotionally with the chorus (Nooter (2012: ch. 5); this intimacy is ruptured by the absence of his body *and* lyrical song. More generally, Lowe (2000: 175) argues that the departure of a central character from the stage is an 'endgame' of the tragic genre.

[53] The division of parts in the *OC* is problematic; it is difficult to avoid there being four actors without dividing the part of Theseus amongst more than one: Ceadel (1941). See further Ringer (1998: 92-93) on the dramatic impact of part-sharing in the play; Rehm (2002: 31, 91, 133-35, 174) on the impact of role-doubling in other tragedies; Jouanna (2018: 205-7). In many proposed part divisions, the same actor plays Oedipus and the Messenger (sometimes Theseus too).

[54] See further Budelmann and van Emde Boas (2020: 60-61) on the various immersive possibilities of a tragic messenger speech, and the different stimuli that compete for attention.

he does (give a third-party report after the event), the Messenger frames the encounter that he offers in terms of distance.

This fundamental play of distance permeates the report in different ways (and to different extents) at different times, and this variation is significant. Generally, when describing the build-up to Oedipus' death, the Messenger's words make an otherwise absent scene imaginatively present for the audience. This presence is defined by immersion, by bringing the audience into the scene (rather than setting aspects of the scene vividly before the audience).[55] There are several features that make the Messenger's account of Oedipus' final moments highly immersive.[56] The sequence in which events are told, for example, accords naturally with the order in which they occurred.[57] There is also an abundance of visual and spatial details, including features of the landscape that might trigger memories of seeing real sites of religious and cultural significance amongst internal and external audiences (even if these features were not located specifically at Colonus).[58] These features are mostly communicated without mediating markers, and the absence of a noticeable filter (retrospective comments, for example) allows the representational status of the account to recede into the background. Indeed, where the Messenger's perspective does shape the narrative, it contributes to the immersive effect precisely because it offers a perspective born of embodied presence within the scene rather

[55] On the difference, see Grethlein (2013: esp. 117-18).
[56] I draw on the taxonomy formulated by Rutgers Allan. See note 17 on page 45.
[57] In the language of narrative theory: plot and story, respectively, or *fabula* and *sjužet* (Russian Formalism) or *récit* and *histoire* (Genette). For an overview of these terms, structuralist contributions to narratological theories and their application to ancient texts, see Schmitz (2007: ch. 3).
[58] Termed 'cognitive frames' in Allan (2020: 18). Saïd (2012: 91-92), for example, discusses the displacement to Colonus of several known features (such as Oedipus' tomb, the location of the covenant between Peirithous and Theseus, the Thorician rock, and the hill of Demeter) from other places in and around Athens. Kelly (2009: 101-2) suggests that the polyvalence of features such as the threshold with bronze steps is deliberate.

than an objective unfurling of events (if such a thing could ever be presented and experienced). For example, the Messenger shares his emotional and sensory responses (1624-25) and appears to provide knowledge restricted by the limits of his sensory apprehension (1598-61).[59] Also effective are features such as direct speech (1611-19; 1627-28, 1631-35, 1640-44), which contribute towards textual transparency, as well as attention to the rules of 'real life' (insofar as emphasis is placed upon the *inexplicability* of the miraculous disappearance). In many ways, then, the Messenger's account produces an encounter with the end of Oedipus' life that is characterised by immersion.

But, for all the intensity with which distance is reduced, it is not completely collapsed. At some crucial points in the narrative, attention is drawn to the mediating role of the Messenger and the nature of the perspective that he offers. The narrative frame is important here. The Messenger opens with a brief commentary on the overall story: 'Actually, this is something you might well find amazing' (1586). He later concludes with reflection upon the interpretations that he has offered, or even the whole speech that he has given: 'And if I do not seem to be speaking in my right mind, I would not ask belief from those to whom I do not seem to be thinking straight' (1665-66). His meditation upon and response to his own discourse, and his suggestion that the appropriate response is one of amazement, pulls against the transparency of his narrative, reminding the audience that he offers

[59] There are two (modest and inconclusive) indications of the Messenger's observing body. He notes 'the hair of all stood upright' (1624-25): is this a perceptive observation or an impression informed by his own emotional state? Earlier, at 1599, an indefinite ποθεν hangs ambiguously on the phrase and verse end, 'fetch water from a running stream … somewhere': is it part of Oedipus' indirect command to his daughters (as suggested by Markantonatos (2002: 136)), or might it acknowledge limitations on the Messenger's knowledge?

a lens, a window, or even a picture, but not a portal.[60] Moreover, the sheer mass of descriptive details that he provides (as opposed to 'action-orientated' details), especially the visual specificities of the landscape at 1589-97, sustain a simultaneous awareness of the scene as an object of visual attention:[61] although the audience and the chorus are drawn into the Messenger's experience, it is an experience of *watching*, not participating. A highly immersive narrative is expressed as an experience of looking and framed as the object of a discourse.[62] To the extent that this might generate not only an encounter with Oedipus' death, but reflection upon the nature of that encounter, the play of proximity and distance models the voyeurism that inheres in watching someone else die: however close one gets, another's death remains a spectacle seen from the outside. That there is a play of focalisation, immersion and distance in a messenger speech is not new, but the epistemological implications for existential reflection are important.

Still more significant is the fact that different descriptive modes do not simply coexist in the Messenger's speech, but cluster at different points in his account. There is a noticeable shift at 1645 from a more direct mode to description that is conspicuously focalised: we suddenly encounter a flurry of references to the Messenger's perceiving eyes (ἐξαπείδομεν, 1648; ὀρῶμεν, 1654) and ears (εἰσηκούσαμεν, 1645), and his actions (ὠμαρτοῦμεν, 1647; ἀπήλθομεν, 1647; στραφέντες, 1648).[63] This influx of overt markers of the speaker's filtering effect

[60] The reflective frame corresponds with the 'metanarrative elements' that counteract transparency: Allan (2020: 19).
[61] On the 'as-if' of narratives, which can simultaneously invite immersion and reflection (awareness of reading or hearing a story), see Grethlein (2017: esp. chs. 2-4).
[62] Freud, triangulation, objectification and ekphrasis: Elsner (2004). Oedipus as the object of others' storytelling: Nooter (2012: esp. 148, 176).
[63] The only other explicit marker is at the narrative's beginning (the first person plural ἡμῖν at 1589).

coincides with the withdrawal of his body from the scene of Oedipus' death.[64] The more direct (which is to say, less noticeably mediated) mode discussed above accompanies the section of the description that covers death's prologue (dying); by contrast, heightened focalisation coincides with the realisation that the Messenger does not and cannot offer a privileged perspective on the end-point of the dying process.[65] He, like Oedipus' daughters, was instructed to leave, to turn away. By the time they turned back, Oedipus had disappeared.

What follows in the Messenger's speech is a tortuous attempt to put into words something that was not and could not be seen. This pushes focalisation to extremes, because the narrative is no longer filtered by the Messenger's perception of the scene but imaginatively shaped by the Messenger's meditation upon what he has *not* perceived (1656-66):

> μόρῳ δ' ὁποίῳ κεῖνος ὤλετ' οὐδ' ἂν εἷς
> θνητῶν φράσειε πλὴν τὸ Θησέως κάρα.
> οὐ γάρ τις αὐτὸν οὔτε πυρφόρος θεοῦ
> κεραυνὸς ἐξέπραξεν οὔτε ποντία
> θύελλα κινηθεῖσα τῷ τότ' ἐν χρόνῳ,
> ἀλλ' ἢ τις ἐκ θεῶν πομπός, ἢ τὸ νερτέρων
> εὔνουν διαστὰν γῆς ἀλάμπετον βάθρον.
> ἀνὴρ γὰρ οὐ στενακτὸς οὐδὲ σὺν νόσοις
> ἀλγεινὸς ἐξεπέμπετ', ἀλλ' εἴ τις βροτῶν
> θαυμαστός. εἰ δὲ μὴ δοκῶ φρονῶν λέγειν,
> οὐκ ἂν παρείμην οἷσι μὴ δοκῶ φρονεῖν.
>
> But by what sort of death that man perished, not one man
> among mortals could tell apart except Theseus.
> For neither a fire-bearing thunderbolt from the god,
> nor a coastal squall, stirred up at that moment,
> these did not bring about his end,
> but either some one of the gods as an escort, or the lightless

[64] Markantonatos (2002: 146) also notes that the Messenger 'draws attention to his presence, only to signal his absence from the mystery'.

[65] Explicit references to the restricted knowledge and understanding of internal narrators as distinctively Sophoclean: de Jong (2007: 290). The Messenger in the *OC* as limited but not unreliable: Scodel (2009: 425). The 'essentially deceitful, agonistic relationship between narrator and narratees of ancient tragedy': Goward (1999: ch. 3, citation on 39).

> foundations of the world below, kind in its splitting of the earth.
> For the man was being called away, not with lament,
> and not pained by disease, but (if any among mortals is)
> as someone extraordinary. And if I do not seem to be speaking in my right mind,
> I would not ask belief from those to whom I do not seem to be thinking straight.

The Messenger's description of the death is emphatic in its negativity: 'not one man among mortals could tell' what happened (οὐδ' ἂν εἷς | θνητῶν φράσειε, 1656-57); 'neither' (οὐ … οὔτε, 1658) a thunderbolt 'nor' (οὔτε, 1659) a squall brought about his end; he was called away 'not with lament' (οὐ στενακτός, 1663) and 'not pained by disease' (οὐδὲ σὺν νόσοις | ἀλγεινός, 1663-64).[66] In sum, the Messenger 'would not ask belief' (οὐκ ἂν παρείμην, 1666) from anyone who does not think he is thinking straight. As such, his suggestions as to what actually happened to Oedipus are a something constructed out of an accumulation of nothings.[67] Admittedly, his positive suggestions (couched in convoluted language of conjecture)[68] are nebulous and obscure: the cause was either some unidentified escort from the gods (τις ἐκ θεῶν πομπός, 1661) or else the 'light-*less*' (ἀλάμπετον, 1662) foundations of the world below, kind in its splitting of the earth (a mysterious formulation that substitutes a visualised chasm for a visual absence: a positive gap for a negative one?). But, after acknowledging the lack of any phenomenological basis for his

[66] The deliberate mystery: Bowra (1944: 342). See further note 108. Compare the third choral ode (1211-48), with its negatives and alpha-privatives: see Segal (1993: 16-20, esp. 19) on tragic negation of song (the 'unmusical muse') and 'representation of joylessness'; Carey (2009: 124-25); Easterling (2009: 168) on 'the paradox of absence ("no strength, no interaction, no friends") being a way of stressing presence ("all evils of evils")'. On death as the 'nonsignifiable "Other"' and the paradox of representing absence, see Bronfen and Webster Goodwin (1992: 7). On how failure to represent something specific (the war) might communicate the unrepresentable and unspeakable experience of it: van Alphen (1992). Lacan, representation and 'a different kind of death…: its symbolic non-being': Buchan (2012: 501). On the sublimity offered by negativity (in Wordsworth): Clarkson (2017). See further page 71.

[67] Emphasising the 'striking tension between certainty and ignorance, or presence and absence, in his narrative': Easterling (2006: 137).

[68] Rutherford (2012: 215-16) admires the simplicity of the Messenger's style here. But stylistic simplicity is combined with conceptual complexity, not just in 1661-62 (as Richard Rutherford observes) but throughout the passage in its persistent negative expression. See further Silk (2009: 153-55) on the complexities of 1661-62.

assertions, the details that he adds put an optimistic spin on the strange event:[69] if the earth split, it was 'in kindness' (εὔνουν 1662); instead of beset by miseries of grief and pain (οὐ στενακτὸς οὐδὲ σὺν νόσοις | ἀλγεινός, 1663-64) Oedipus was 'on the contrary' (ἀλλά, 1664) 'marvellous' (θαυμαστός, 1665).

The Messenger is both observer and recounter. The narrative he tells, a literary reshaping of what he saw into a cohesive and articulate story, something 'conspicuously appropriate to be wondered at' (κἀποθαυμάσαι πρέπον, 1586), reflects a creative shaping in his mind in response to the scene at the time he observed it.[70] This 'making' dynamic is common to narratives, especially messenger speeches,[71] but plays out with particular subtlety in descriptions of deaths because imaginations and conceptualisations of 'what death is' must, we think, always be constructed in ignorance from the outside, by those that observe and respond to another's death.[72] An audience's reliance upon the narrative representation of Oedipus' death by the Messenger, who holds no special privilege, replicates a more far-reaching reliance on the perceptual, interpretative and imaginative capabilities of the living in response to death. The distance that is embedded in the Messenger's verbal representation of Oedipus' death does not

[69] Bernard (2001: 157-59) also points to indications that the Messenger is uncertain as to whether he has correctly interpreted events; this forms part of his discussion of evidence that Oedipus' end is not meant to be seen as a good one.
[70] See further Markantonatos (2002: 130).
[71] I include here other similar descriptive accounts which may or may not be given by 'messengers' or 'heralds'.
[72] See further Williams (2006): drama (or any work of art) has a role in supporting contemplation and comprehension of death, rather than, necessarily, making it good, beautiful or pleasant; it is 'stark fiction'. Mortals' quest for coherence in their own and others' stories: Roberts (1989: 175-76). Elsewhere she discusses the desire for an 'ending beyond the ending', an aftermath that makes it possible to look back upon a life in its entirety (all the more enticing in literature for being impossible for one's own death): Roberts (1997: 254). But, suggesting that Oedipus 'has lived long enough to understand the meaning of his own story': Cole (1992: xxxv).

compromise a direct experience that his audience missed so much as simulate the distance of encountering death from the perspective of the living.

On this note, I turn to features of the speech that present what the Messenger saw in terms of spectacle. What is it about the end of Oedipus' life that invites attention, that makes it (implicitly in the Messenger's eyes and ultimately in the Messenger's speech) 'something suitable for wonder' (κἀποθαυμάσαι πρέπον, 1586)? I examine below first the landscape in which the scene is set, and then the presentation of Oedipus. Finally, I return to the Messenger's mysterious, negative-ridden account of his disappearance, approaching it from the other side of the coin (less in terms of what it reveals about the subjectivity of the Messenger's account, and more in terms of what it might reveal about the demands made by the moment of death).

Consider the Messenger's description of the landscape in which the last moments of Oedipus' life are spent (1590-97):

> ἐπεὶ δ' ἀφῖκτο τὸν καταρράκτην ὀδὸν
> χαλκοῖς βάθροισι γῆθεν ἐρριζωμένον,
> ἔστη κελεύθων ἐν πολυσχίστων μιᾷ,
> κοίλου πέλας κρατῆρος, οὗ τὰ Θησέως
> Περίθου τε κεῖται πίστ' ἀεὶ ξυνθήματα·
> ἀφ' οὗ μέσος στὰς τοῦ τε Θορικίου πέτρου
> κοίλης τ' ἀχέρδου κἀπὶ λαΐνου τάφου
> καθέζετ'.
>
> And when he reached the down-rushing journey
> planted from the earth with bronze steps,
> he stood at one of the branching paths,
> near a hollow crater, where lies the
> ever faithful covenant of Theseus and Peirithous;
> beside this (he stood in the centre) and the Thorician rock,
> by a hollow pear tree and upon a stony tomb
> he took his seat.

The pathway at which Oedipus ends one journey and begins another has the motion of a down-rushing waterfall, but is 'rooted' or 'implanted' from beneath the earth (γῆθεν ἐρριζωμένον, 1591) with bronze steps: these solid, polished objects spring like plants from the earth and fall like rapid water.[73] Likewise, the 'hollow crater' (κοίλου […] κρατῆρος, 1593) can simultaneously be visualized as a naturally occurring hollow or rock basin and a mixing bowl.[74] Indeed, the latter, an artefact in its own right, would comprise a suitable memorial for another cultural artefact: the 'bringing together' of Peirithous and Theseus, a covenant that held everlasting faith (πίστ' ἀεὶ ξυνθήματα, 1594) and was probably marked with libation and possibly by ritual death (sacrifice).[75] The landscape is a paradox of moving-stillness and nature-culture.

Moreover, together with the stone that marks Thoricus, the steps and bowl produce a landscape characterized by materiality and durability. But the bowl's cavity is also a void, and its vacuum is echoed by the hollow pear tree (κοίλης τ' ἀχέρδου, 1596); these are two empty objects that endure in the landscape. Indeed, these hollows are beside a stony τάφος (1596), a grave or tomb.[76] The τάφος is inanimate and material, and it partners an organism that is a shell, a hollow wild pear tree. Do

[73] Budelmann (2000b: 189) also comments on the paradoxical nature of Oedipus' death (an ending and a transformation). On the ὁδός as both a physical and dynamic 'way': Easterling (2011: 76-77). Similar in concept to the journey that both ends and begins is the simultaneous death and birth articulated on two fourth-century gold tablets found in tombs in Thessaly: these are discussed in Herrero de Jäuregui (2013: 53); see note 34. See further Segal (1981: 369) and Avezzù and Guidorizzi (2008: 372-73) on 1591: the idea that 'roots' connect the surface of the earth to its depths can be traced to Hes. *Theog.* 726-28. The scholiast reads the crater as a natural hollow: Xenis (2018) on 1593.

[74] See further Jebb (2004a: 245-46); Birge (1984: 16): mention of the κρατήρ here recalls the chorus' reference to a κρατήρ at 158-60 when they described the grove of the Eumenides, not to be entered.

[75] See Jebb (2004a: 245-46).

[76] Note the 'seat belonging to dead goddesses' in Apollo's prophecy (*OC* 89-90), and the discussion in Budelmann (2000b) of the rocks upon which Oedipus took his seat in the first scene, and how they foreshadowed Oedipus' death.

both these objects mark death?[77] If so, they mark death as some sort of interface between transience and intransience, matter and void. Compare the covenant (τὰ […] πίστ' ἀεὶ ξυνθήματα) that stands in contrast to the transience of the living, who came and went like Peirithous and Theseus (their bodies have departed but their faith endures), or like visitors at the grave (τάφος).[78] The landmarks of the place insist upon its solidity, its permanence, but at the centre is hollowed space and a path that becomes a sheer drop.

The landscape as a whole is thus a paradox: it mixes motion and stillness, presence and absence, nature and culture.[79] Andrea Nightingale might call this 'ecological eschatology';[80] James Porter might call it 'sublime'.[81] What each term and

[77] On associations between the landscape in this passage and death (and, indeed, mystery cult), see especially Calame (1998: 336-42) on landmarks that point towards Oedipus' *katabasis* or 'passage vertical', such as the bronze steps that are like plunging roots, the crater (a metaphorical mouth, he suggests) and connections to the myth of Persephone's abduction by Hades; Budelmann (2000b: 189-91); Markantonatos (2002: 198-208) (on Colonus as a transformation of Eleusis); Avezzù and Guidorizzi (2008: 374) on 1595-96. The scholiast comments that the path is 'down-rushing' because it is thought to be the entrance to Hades and that some said Persephone was seized there: Xenis (2018) on 1590-91. The landscape of Colonus and grove of the Eumenides has also been studied as a setting for Oedipus' transformation into a hero: see Birge (1984). See further Easterling (2006: 141-44).

[78] Contrasting the fragility of an object with the presence and permanence of the dead: Arrington (2014: 7). On the discourse provoked by Graeco-Roman funerary monuments on the absence/presence of the corpse: Elsner (2012a); Estrin (2016), (2018); Arrington (2018: 21-24); Squire (2018b); Brown (2019). The paradox of Oedipus' departure (he is gone but remains present): Easterling (2011: 82); the liminal state of Oedipus' unburied corpse (and the roots of this concept in the *Iliad*): Van Nortwick (2012: 145-47). 'The life that is forever' as a possible metaphor for death: Currie (2012: 341) (see note 19). The real continuing presence of a cult hero and his tomb (by contrast with his incipient heroization in Homeric epic and Sophoclean drama): Henrichs (1993: esp. 165).

[79] See especially Avezzù and Guidorizzi (2008: 374) on 1595 on the confusing space-time and marginality of this middle (μέσος) ground; Oedipus is positioned between natural and cultivated, living and dead. Compare Budelmann (2000b: esp. 186) on the emphasis on what is natural and unshaped in the Colonan landscape at the start of the play.

[80] 'Ecological eschatology' is a term and concept discussed by Andrea Nightingale in relation to the *Phaedo*: see note 99 on page 67. This geographic threshold is also 'the threshold of existence': Reinhardt (1979: 222-23). Compare the Colonus of the chorus' song at 668-719, full of 'végétation luxuriante' but 'paradoxalement attaché a la mort': Calame (1998: 338). 'The movement that happens at the edges of the earth marks both ends of life': Montiglio (1960: 11). See further Easterling (2009: 169) on 'darkly unknowable places' and temporal and spatial limits in the ode at 1211-48.

[81] See Porter (2016: 51-52) on transgression of 'limits' to the 'place beyond', 'lasting and everlasting qualities', 'gaps', 'extraordinary heights and depths', and 'contrasts' as instances of the sublime. See further Haselswerdt (2019) on sound and the sublime in the *OC*; note 103.

associated thinking captures is the principle that an encounter with landscape description might offer access to something fundamentally mysterious like death.[82] Much hangs upon language (upon the status of the landscape as a description, not nature itself): the polysemy of κρατήρ, the ability of metaphorical language and thought to 'plant' steps both neutrally and surprisingly in and out of the earth.[83] It is not just the extraordinary nature of Oedipus' death that imbues the place where he will die with existential significance, but the way that Sophocles' Messenger describes that place when he turns land into a landscape, a location into a setting.[84]

Let us turn to Oedipus' body, which arrives, stands, then takes its seat within the imagined landscape (ἐπεὶ δ' ἀφῖκτο […] ἕστη […] στάς […] καθέζετο, 1590-97)

[82] In this respect, the philosophical *theoria* discussed by Andrea Nightingale is not just a theoretical version of a political and religious cultural practice of spectatorship, but actually emerges out of encounters with the world. This includes the real world and the cultural world (a messenger's account, or, indeed, a tragic performance, which is to say real *theoria* as much as a real death). See especially Nightingale (2001: 53-54) on 'ecological' *theoria*, together with Nightingale (2001) generally and her more extensive treatment in (2004) on how fourth-century philosophers positioned themselves as spectator-theorists (lookers rather than listeners, spectators rather than performers), drawing upon the contemporary Greek practice of *theoria*. See further notes 32 and 98 on pages 49 and 67.

[83] See Goldhill (2012: ch. 1, esp. 23-25, 36) on Sophoclean irony, especially on the ambiguity of *lusis* and its association with death and the *telos* of life in the *OC* (see chapter one for similar language in Plato's *Phaedo*). See Easterling (1999) on the powerful simplicity of Sophocles' language in the *OC.* Kirkwood (1994: 261) comments that the *OC* is 'less ironical in theme than any of the [other six surviving plays by Sophocles]'. This is true to the extent that Oedipus does not know less than the audience. Indeed, G. M. Kirkwood points out that, in the *OC*, the irony of sight and blindness of the *OT* is reversed. But could we go further? The divergence of perspectives in the crisis scene, discussed above, reveals that Oedipus is *more* knowledgeable not just than other characters such as the chorus, but even than the audience. Jouanna (2018: 449-50) emphasises Oedipus' early awareness of his destiny ('a total surprise for the spectators'). The play *is* highly ironical, but in a different way from that usually understood. See Goldhill (2012: 26-37) on how Sophocles 'ironizes irony', turning attention upon the audience's misplaced sense of superior knowledge.

[84] See Fearn (Forthcoming b) on lyric contemplation of nature and landscape and 'transformations of space into place'. Connected is Andrea Rodighiero's discussion of nature as a '*cultural* backdrop' in the *OC*, the Colonan landscape as a 'literary construction of a collection of spatial memories': Rodighiero (2012: esp. 57, 79). Compare Bohrer (2016) on aestheticization of violence in tragedy (represented in and mediated by words).

and, as in a tableau, never moves again from that place.[85] Like his environment, Oedipus' body becomes an object of attention in his final moments (1597-99):[86]

> […] εἶτ' ἔλυσε δυσπινεῖς στολάς.
> κἄπειτ' ἀύσας παῖδας ἠνώγει ῥυτῶν
> ὑδάτων ἐνεγκεῖν λουτρὰ καὶ χοάς ποθεν·
> τὼ δ' εὐχλόου Δήμητρος εἰς προσόψιον
> πάγον μολούσα τάσδ' ἐπιστολὰς πατρὶ
> ταχεῖ 'πόρευσαν ξὺν χρόνῳ, λουτροῖς τέ νιν
> ἐσθῆτί τ' ἐξήσκησαν ᾗ νομίζεται.
> ἐπεὶ δὲ πᾶσαν ἔσχε δρῶντος ἡδονὴν
> κοὐκ ἦν ἔτ' οὐδὲν ἀργὸν ὧν ἐφίετο […]
>
> and he undid his filthy dress.
> And then, calling to his daughters, he urged them to bring
> flowing water from somewhere for bathing and libation;
> and they both went to a crag that was sacred to fresh and green
> Demeter
> and in full view, and brought the waters requested by their father
> quickly, and they readied his body, bathing him
> and dressing him in the customary way.
> And when he was satisfied with the work,
> and there was no longer anything left to do…

Oedipus strips his body (ἔλυσε δυσπινεῖς στολάς, 1597) and is washed and dressed by his daughters (λουτροῖς τέ νιν | ἐσθῆτί τ' ἐξήσκησαν ᾗ νομίζεται, 1602-3). Though he continues, for the moment, to exert control over what happens to him (his daughters act in accordance with his instructions, τάσδ' ἐπιστολάς, 1601), the emphasis on his body as an object of others' sight, touch, perhaps even smell (when he exchanges his 'filthy dress', δυσπινεῖς στολάς, for funerary clothes), prefigures his ontological transfiguration from person to corpse.[87]

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[85] In this respect, the imagined scene replays the staged scene that lasted for much of the play. The resulting picture is another scene of temporal limbo, an expansion of the 'final hour' before death. On motion in the *OC*, see Hutchinson (2020a: 153-90, esp. 182-89): as Gregory Hutchinson discusses, the absence of motion at the end of Oedipus' life (as described by the Messenger) is striking in its denial of an audience's expectations that death will involve movement (set by the ode at 1556-78 and the god's question at 1627-28, τί μέλλομεν | χωρεῖν;) and its contrast to the unusually laboured and violent motions earlier in the play.

[86] Indeed, see Carey (2009: 128-33) on the presentation of Oedipus in the third ode as a topographical feature.

[87] There is emphasis on the visuality of bodies on the brink of death more widely in Greek tragedy. Consider Alcestis' attention to surface (ἐσθῆτα) and ornament (κόσμον) at Eur. *Alc.* 161, shaping her dying body into a work of art akin to the representational substitute that Admetus promises to

This physical objectification of Oedipus is symbolically reinforced by the ritual significance of washing. As emphasised by others, the act of washing Oedipus at this point (and also the libations that are offered: λουτρὰ καὶ χοάς, 1599) imparts the significance of this moment not just in relation to Oedipus' death, but his subsequent heroization.[88] But where others have focused on mystic significance, it is also worth thinking about how the washing generates an encounter with death. The act of washing and beautifying Oedipus' body (especially at the hands of his daughters) picks up the sense in which he is already perceived by himself, and now his daughters, to be dead. When Antigone and Ismene wash their father's body they treat him like the corpse he would usually become when he dies: they bring a process that would normally follow his death (the washing of a corpse by female members of the family, part of what has been widely interpreted as the ancient

embrace in their bed (*Alc.* 348-54); Alcestis' wasted body, a 'burden' that retains its beauty (*Alc.* 173-74, 203-4); Iphigenia—'conspicuous as in a painting' (Aesch. *Ag.* 239-42, citation at 242); Polyxena's self-exposure, as beautiful as an ἄγαλμα (Eur. *Hec.* 560-61). In other cases, death's silent visual spectacle is a moment of artistic creation: fr. 307 attributed to Aeschylus (Loeb); Eur. *HF* 990-94. See especially Bassi (2018) on the corpse in Euripides' *Alcestis*, which '[calls] attention to the divide between living beings and non-living things' with its materiality; Wohl (2018) on Euripides' *Trojan Woman* and the merging of man and matter in the context of tragic death. See further Stieber (2011: 145-180, 215) on Euripides' 'aesthetic of transforming female suffering into a beautified spectacle'. More generally, on death, bodies, art and beauty (ranging from the Bronze Age to Imperial Roman material), see for example Vernant (1991a); Treherne (1995); Parker Pearson (2003: esp. 71) on the corpse as a 'carefully crafted artefact'; Trimble (2018) on death, transformation, and visual ontologies. See further Tyrtaeus fr. 10 West (esp. v. 30) on the beauty of dying in the front ranks as a young man. A recent discussion of the body as aesthetic artefact in early poetry: Zeitlin (2018). This effect would prove particularly interesting in other tragedies if the dead were displayed as an 'effigy' on the *ekkyklema*, as Jebb (2004b: 141) on 915 suggests for Ajax. See further Jouanna (2018: 233-34). *pace* van Erp Taalman Kip (2006: 49), who argues that in the Messenger's speech Oedipus now touches others rather than being touched (he is ἄθικτος); Bassi (2018: 35, 36) on the possibility that a living human played the corpse.

[88] See Jouanna (1995: 49-51). Oedipus' body has preternatural significance because it will become a source of protection for Athens and a focus for hero cult. Much of the play's drama revolves around the gift or denial of his body and the trouble or protection that will arise from its tomb. For example, Ismene's revelation that the Thebans will 'set up' or 'make stand' (στήσωσι, 399) Oedipus near the Cadmean land where they can 'exert power' (400) over him, for fear his tomb, being unlucky, will prove a grievous burden (402), hinted at an overlap of body and tomb, bringing to mind the standing archaic *kouros* which replaced and represented the body of the deceased. See also: 576-77, 581-82. See further Van Nortwick (2015: 117-18) on how 'heroic bodies as physical objects […] on stage influence the outcome of all three [of Sophocles' late] plays'; his chapter on the *OC* attends to the movement of and claims upon Oedipus' body on the stage.

Greek dying 'process') into the final moments of his life.[89] Moreover, the language in which the Messenger describes the dressing of Oedipus' body picks up on the visuality of the Greek funeral, as seen in images of the *prothesis* on Attic pots.[90] In one word, Oedipus' daughters 'dress' Oedipus, 'adorn' him, and 'ready' him in suitable trappings for death: ἐξήσκησαν. Extension of the normal dying process (and its associated visuality) into the final moments of Oedipus' life becomes another example of how, in tragedy, expectation of imminent demise can blur with the onset of death; extension of the spectacle of death (which is to say, a dead body's impact upon the living) into dying's *longue durée* is a distinctively tragic 'beautiful death', and the rewards it brings are unclear.[91] Compare Socrates' declaration in the *Phaedo*, 'But already now my appointed time is calling me, a tragic man would say, and it is nearly time for me to go for a bath' (115a5-7). Mock heroics and teasing aside,[92] one way in which Socrates is very much like a man out of a Greek tragedy, a man like Oedipus, is in the foreknowledge that he has of his death. Both he and Oedipus can stage a significant 'final day' for their audience because, extraordinarily, the hour of their end is known.

[89] On Greek death as a process, see pages 11-12 (including note 15). Arguing for mysticism here: Calame (1998: 349); Markantonatos (2007: 213); Ferrari (2003a). Linforth (1954: 176-77) differs. On acts of purification in ancient Greece in response to the pollution of death, see Parker (1983: 35-39).
[90] See pages 86-87 (including note 31).
[91] See Vernant (1991a) on the Homeric beautiful death and epic's literary role in that transcendence, and (1991b) on lyric poetry and lifetime praise. Touching on tragedy's dubious rewards for death: Soph. *Ant.* 801-52; Jebb (1900: 153) on 834-38. Likewise, Pelling (1997: 236-37) emphasises that though a tragedy 'typically offers some "restitution" or "compensation" in a closing scene', it often ends in discomfort and 'cradle to grave may not be enough' (p. 250). Tragedy's self-conscious reflection on the life it can bestow a story in 'the city's collective memory' (and Euripides' problematisation of art's substitute for death in *Alcestis*): Segal (1993: esp. 6, ch. 3). See further Segal (1992b: 107-10). On the 'material/immaterial trace that is the play's own language', see Wohl (2018: 33) on Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Compare the immortality offered Socrates by Plato in the *Phaedo*, as part of a discourse on the epistemological challenges posed by death (see chapter one).
[92] See chapter one and also Goldhill (2012: 142).

The impression of death before death is reinforced by the Messenger's description of the characters' responses to the last thunderclap. The sound precipitates shuddering, howling, unremitting breast-beating and prolonged wails of grief from Oedipus' daughters as they fall to their knees in a ritual lament that seems temporally premature (1606-9). But, folding his arms about them (πτύξας ἐπ' αὐταῖς χεῖρας, 1611), Oedipus confirms (1611-13):

> […] ὦ τέκνα,
> οὐκ ἔστ' ἔθ' ὑμῖν τῆδ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ πατήρ.
> ὄλωλε γὰρ δὴ πάντα τἀμά…
>
> … Children,
> on this day your father no longer exists!
> For all that is mine is dead…

Once the final day is reached, Oedipus 'exists no longer' and everything relating to him 'is dead'. A pseudo-corpse, he still has arms with which to embrace, but no more life (and in fact, following Sarah Nooter's analysis, no poetic voice).[93] This paradoxical situation is further communicated in a grammatical switch from objective to subjective perspectives, together articulating the coexistence of alive and dead Oedipuses. In 'your father no longer exists' Oedipus presents himself as a third person subject from the perspective of his daughters; in 'all that is mine is dead' the personal pronoun communicates that the perspective is now his own. But it is surely one thing for the living to observe another's death and another for the one who is dead to do so?[94] Indeed, both statements make use of a grammatical absurdity: in each, the subject governs an action of perfected non-existence.

[93] Nooter (2012: 175-77) on Oedipus' shift from poetic voice to 'object of another's narrative'.
[94] Though Keith Lehrer has argued that the final moment of life is an aesthetic moment for the dying, whose last thought will be 'thought of what [they are], completed with [their] death': Lehrer (2011: 106). Perhaps there is something of this completed life's story in Oedipus' contemplation here of everything that is his in the moment that it ceases to be. See note 72.

Either way, Oedipus' dying perspective concurs with the emotional response of his daughters and, once he has spoken, all three mourn his death. As such, the scene presents an extraordinary *prothesis* in which the living (including the dying) mourn the dying before he has gone. Still more remarkable, in this deathbed-*cum*-funeral scene the living and the dead 'lie upon one another' in grief (ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισιν ἀμφικείμενοι, 1620): though this phrase presumably communicates a close embrace,[95] it imports an image of piled bodies, even corpses.[96] In a variation of tropes familiar from the ritual lament (in which the living contrast their state with that of the deceased, or wish that they were dead or had never been born), each person doubles as mourner and mourned.[97]

What does this scene have in common with the landscape description discussed above? Most notable is that in both cases (the setting and the characters positioned within it), the Messenger describes what he saw before the death in terms of death's aftermath. Oedipus is washed, dressed, laid out and mourned like a corpse; he is also seated upon a tomb, beside a tree that is already hollow. In each, the impact of a perfected state is imported to a final moment, expanding that moment (which in reality is gone in an instant) into a significant final day. There may be something distinctively tragic in this, in encountering a death that is so well foretold it can imbue a mysterious present with actions and images yet to come. And part of what makes this possible is the messenger speech format: the Messenger knows what will happen because he has already seen it. Indeed, this seems to reinforce a

[95] In fact, this word seems particularly memorable when used to describe a family group marked by incest. On intimations of this 'claustrophobic intimacy' in the *OC*, see Holmes (2013: 34-35).
[96] Compare Soph. *Ant.* 1291-92.
[97] Alexiou (2002: 171-78). See further Antigone's words at *OC* 1683-88.

dramatic irony to which the tragic genre lends itself: the mythological subject matter has, in a loose sense, been seen before.

Let us return, finally, to the concluding section of the Messenger's speech. As discussed above, the Messenger concludes his report with an inventive and decidedly negative explanation of Oedipus' disappearance. He introduces that explanation with a description of Theseus' response to the sight of Oedipus' death (1647-52):

> […] ὡς δ' ἀπήλθομεν,
> χρόνῳ βραχεῖ στραφέντες, ἐξαπείδομεν
> τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν μὲν οὐδαμοῦ παρόντ' ἔτι,
> ἄνακτα δ' αὐτὸν ὀμμάτων ἐπίσκιον
> χεῖρ' ἀντέχοντα κρατός, ὡς δεινοῦ τινος
> φόβου φανέντος οὐδ' ἀνασχετοῦ βλέπειν.
>
> … and when we had gone away,
> after a short time we turned around, and we observed from far off
> the man, the former no longer present anywhere,
> whereas the king, alone, to shade his eyes,
> was holding his hand against his head, as if some dreadful
> source of fear had appeared, not endurable to see.

Though Oedipus made clear that his death should not be seen or heard by anyone apart from Theseus (1640-44), the Messenger turns back and looks (1647-52), albeit too late.[98] Theseus' pose suggests a recoiling, a shielding from the 'strange-awesome-dreadful-horrible' (δεινοῦ) 'cause of terror' or 'cause of panicked flight' (φόβου) that 'appeared to the senses' (φανέντος), an unseen vision, perhaps a

[98] 'There is a gap or mystery—the journey's end cannot be known': Easterling (2011: 81). Alignment of the audience with the 'citizens' of whom he says 'I cannot disclose it to any of these': Reinhardt (1979: 220). Compare Easterling (1993: 199-200), who suggests that Theseus in the *OC* might stand for the privileged spectator, a mortal chosen to witness things beyond mortal comprehension. In fact, if the same actor played Theseus, the Messenger and Oedipus, then he would embody those who did and did not see. On the division of parts in the *OC*, see note 53. On the development of Sophocles' sentence here, and the slow realisation that 'the man' seen by the Messenger was Theseus and not Oedipus, see Haselswerdt (2019: 630). On Sophocles' unpredictable sentences, which make spectators think and re-think their expectations, see Budelmann (2000a: ch. 1). For further work on Sophocles' language, see Silk (2009) on Sophocles' 'magisterial elusiveness'; Long (1968) on his love of abstracts, especially in his later plays.

moment of darkness involving the 'lightless foundation of the earth' (γῆς ἀλάμπετον βάθρον, 1662), perhaps a blinding flash of light, for Theseus responds by shading his eyes.[99] Death revealed is an unendurable sight (οὐδ' ἀνασχετοῦ βλέπειν, 1652). Like the corpses seen by Leontius in Plato's *Republic*, death's 'fine spectacle' attracts and repulses the gaze.[100] This two-way impulse is a recurrent feature of tragic death scenes (in Sophocles and more widely) where language shifts between lurid detail and the feeling that such visual horror must not or cannot be seen or told.[101] The correspondence between the draw and repulsion of death and its stirring of desire to see what is unseeable, to transgress what is forbidden (by the gods or otherwise), tips death's moment of visual impossibility into ethical non-permissibility. The unseeable nature of Oedipus' death arises from a running theme of ritual mystery and the point that his body will hold a sacred and political power. In other dramatic examples, the voyeurism of looking at another's death slips into erotic gratification.[102] Unseen and visually overwhelming, obscure and blinding, desired and shunned, the collisions of opposites capture a moment of unseeable magnitude.

[99] Nooter (2012: 176) notes that this gesture, and the accompanying prayer, is also how worshippers greeted the Eumenides.
[100] Pl. *Resp.* 439e6-440a3. On death's destabilising impact on sight (and the other senses): Turner (2016: esp. 160).
[101] Consider: *Aj.* 915 and 1004; *El.* 755-56 and 864; *Trach.* 961. Compare the paradox of beautiful horror in *Ag.* 659 (a sea 'flowers' with corpses) and *Tro.* 1175-77 (the αἰσχρά of Astyanax's 'slaughter of shattered bones' 'laughs' from the curls his mother used to kiss, a radiant ugliness). Sophocles the honeybee, unflinching but not excessive in confrontation of horror: Buxton (1995: 8-9). On tragic pleasure as satisfaction of an appetite for affective intensity, including bodily and emotional pain, see Liebert (2017).
[102] Consider: Soph. *Ant.* 1234-43; *Trach.* 912-31. The psychodynamics of ekphrasis, including the gap between subject and object and the desire of the gaze: Elsner (2004: 164-71). On the transgression and taboo associated with ekphrasis (which involves a movement between media), see Scott (1994: preface).

As observed above, these are characteristic markers of the sublime.[103] The Messenger's description of Theseus' response to the moment of Oedipus' death thus represents (vicariously) an existential moment that is on the borders of conceptual possibility with poetic sublimity, and so gives form to a theory. The conceptualisation of dying as involving some form of liminality is a familiar one in anthropological theory.[104] But while anthropological ideas of transition from life to death usually focus on process, and ultimately upon the return to normality (from the perspective of the living), it is also important that the liminal is an edge-point, a final border.[105] And this sense of life's farthest margin (τέρμα, τελευτή, ῥοπή) finds artistic expression in a dual-impact of attraction and repulsion.[106]

OEDIPUS: IF ANYONE AMONG MORTALS IS WONDROUS

When it comes to the mystery of death, the *OC* takes matters to extremes. Death is, in a real, physical sense, continually absent: for most of the play, Oedipus' death is

[103] See Porter (2016: 51-54) for a typology of causes that provoke the sublime in antiquity. See further Porter (2015: 401) on sublimity and recoil or pursuit, (2016: 141-47, 390-97) on sublimity of the moment, the material foundations of the sublime, and the 'materiality and immateriality of *experience itself*'; Haselswerdt (2019) on sound and the ineffable, sublimity and the abject in the *OC* and the play's 'preoccupation with perceptual distance and proximity'. For James Porter, 'the sublime produces profound mental or spiritual disruption, […] the shock of the Real' (p. 5); it is concerned with 'the reality of a world […] in all of its unfathomable extraordinariness' (p. 618). See further Costelloe (2012: 2) on 'the sublime, which, at its etymological heart, carries the long history of the relationship between human beings and those aspects of the world that excite in the particular emotions, powerful enough to evoke transcendence, shock, awe, and terror'. Compare Halliwell (2012: 34-35, ch. 7) on metaphysics of the sublime and 'the mind's heightened awareness of its capacity to transcend the boundaries of finite, material existence...' Indeed, Longinus cites the *OC* at *Subl.* 15.7, but, as Ella Haselswerdt observes (p. 629), focuses more on how skilfully Sophocles visualises the dying Oedipus and his self-burial than on what is invisible. The sublimity of the play was also a central theme in eighteenth-century responses to the play, as explored in Ryan (2010: 30-88). See note 66 on death's sublimity, negativity and unrepresentability.

[104] See page 12 (including note 16).

[105] Compare concern on sarcophagi with *ta eschata*: Platt (2012: 227).

[106] The continuum in Sophocles between abstract and concrete, psychological and physical: Sullivan (1999: 213). See further notes 80 and 82 on Andrea Nightingale's link between cultural and philosophical *theoria* and articulation of 'ecological eschatology'.

in the future, an absent object of present expectation; when his death occurs, it does so off stage, unfolding in retrospective discourse.[107] There is thus no direct encounter with the moment of death. Instead, encounters with Oedipus' death, and meditations on death more generally, are generated by performed responses to death's prelude and aftermath. This is a familiar theme from elsewhere in my thesis, but the *OC* exaggerates the imperceptibility of the instant of death by removing Oedipus bodily from the stage, a stage where he has been continually physically present, and by framing encounters with that death (when it does occur) as the object of a discourse about, among other things, knowability and visuality.

I have focused on two scenes in this chapter. The first staged different perspectives on death, those of the living and dying; Oedipus' viewpoint, characterised by distinctive vision and understanding, offered an impression of what it might be like to die but also turned attention upon the epistemological problems surrounding knowing anything from another's potentially unreliable testimony. The second staged an account of Oedipus' final moments by the Messenger. Though the account was shown to be highly immersive, it was nevertheless defined by distance in that the experience it offered was one of seeing (or not seeing), of struggling to define something unknowable from what is knowable by the senses. Indeed, seeing Oedipus approach death involved seeing him and his setting in metaphorical terms, as the lifeless, hollow body he would become after death, an object of sensory attention by the living (in ritual washing, for example). Then, heightened emphasis on the Messenger's mediating role as his narrative approached the end of Oedipus'

[107] Edmunds (1996: 153-54) also notes these temporal deferrals of Oedipus' death (for most of the play deferred from the present to the future and then, in the Messenger's speech, deferred from the past to present).

life brought the epistemological challenges presented by that moment into the foreground. This was corroborated by presentation of Oedipus and his surroundings as, *in extremis*, points of paradoxical attraction and repulsion, visibility and invisibility, knowability and invention.

In defining the endpoint of Oedipus' life by imperceptibility and unknowability, the *OC* prompts similar reflections on the epistemological challenges of encountering death to those generated by Plato's *Phaedo* and painted pots. In doing this by, in part, removing the moment of a character's death from the stage, it is representative of a tendency more broadly within the tragic genre (or, at least, within the surviving corpus).

However, the *OC* also, in its own way, pushes imperceptibility and unknowability further than other plays. After Oedipus leaves the stage he is never seen again. In contrast to several other tragedies, a corpse is not produced on stage. This absence is momentous, and attention is drawn to it in the scene that follows the Messenger's speech. Of course, one essential reason for the absence of his corpse is that Oedipus' body and place of burial must remain concealed for supernatural and political reasons; provided that Theseus keeps them hidden, Athens (simultaneously Theseus' land and the fifth-century *polis*) will remain free from pain (1760-67).[108] But the distressed responses of Oedipus' daughters call attention to something more problematic about the absence of Oedipus' body: it denies his family the opportunity to receive, wash and dress his body, to participate in the funeral, and to

[108] Markantonatos (2002: 115-65), especially, draws attention to the mystery at the heart of the Messenger's narrative but argues throughout that Sophocles' purpose is to emphasise the heroic, miraculous nature of Oedipus' death. See notes 18 and 19.

sustain a connection with him by visiting his tomb.[109] The deathly landscape and premature funerary ritual in the Messenger's ekphrasis makes its real absence at the end of the play more stark.[110] 'A longing grips me', Antigone says, 'to see the home beneath the earth' (ἵμερος ἔχει μέ τις […] τὰν χθόνιον ἑστίαν ἰδεῖν, 1725-26). It is ambiguous whether she wishes to visit her father's tomb or to die herself (perhaps both), but she is later more explicit in her request to Theseus, 'we want to look upon the tomb of our father ourselves' (τύμβον θέλομεν | προσιδεῖν αὐταὶ πατρὸς ἡμετέρου, 1756-57). The physical presence of the corpse and the tomb is important to the living. This is not just for forensic reasons (proof of death), though perhaps the absence of a dead body is one reason why some critics have proposed that Oedipus does not die at all but instead transcends mortal life.[111] The absence of a corpse and a tomb also means a missed encounter with death and the dead.[112] Without these material objects, the living are left hanging, unable to forge a new relationship with the dead and so to continue their own lives in a new equilibrium.[113] This situation would have been familiar to many Athenians, who, for much of the fifth century, were restricted in their access to the bodies of the war dead or private

[109] See chapter two on encountering death through *lekythoi*.
[110] Avezzù and Guidorizzi (2008: 371) on 1579-779 speaks of the great void ('questo grande vuoto') that Oedipus leaves behind him. Indeed, death has imbued the Colonan landscape setting from the beginning of the play. On the 'deep strain of sadness' that underlies the play's lyric celebration of Athens, see Knox (1964: 155-56). Saïd (2012: 85) also mentions the association of the grove with death and mourning motifs. Markantonatos (2002: esp. 115-30) traces an expectation during the play of Oedipus' heroic death, but focuses on the mysterious nature of the event.
[111] Note the chorus' apparent ignorance of Oedipus' death even following the Messenger's report, perhaps prompted by the absence of Oedipus' corpse: 'He is gone?' they ask Antigone (1678), as if they had not recently asked him the same question (1583). (Burton (1980: 271) differs, arguing for deletion of the question mark so that the chorus confirm, not question, Oedipus death.)
[112] See further Segal (1981: 402): Antigone is 'barred from the actual experience of [her father's] death which would give it emotional reality'.
[113] In contrast, Murnaghan (1987: 40-41), cited in Wilson (2004: 57, n. 36), finds finality reinforced by absence of lamentation or corpse; Markantonatos (2002: 150) who emphasises the kommos form of the narrative and comments that the medium of lamentation 'allows the girls to place the event within an emotional and chronological perspective'. But, as Emily Wilson observes (pp. 56-57), those left behind endure a living death. See further Segal (1998: 136-37).

tombs at which to mourn them.[114] But this familiarity would surely have made the scene more raw; far from making Oedipus' death ordinary (or at least closer to ordinary), it throws the extraordinary, unsatisfactory nature of a death without a body, without a funeral, without a tomb, into sharper relief.[115] In removing from the stage not just the moment of death but its aftermath, the *OC* puts its own, distinct emphasis upon the mystery that ordinarily surrounds death.

This returns us to the problematic power of the *OC* as a mediator of more general existential reflection. Oedipus' death, like Oedipus himself, sits somewhere between ordinary and extraordinary. As a man that dies in his old age, Oedipus' death seems refreshingly ordinary (at least by comparison with most deaths that occur in Greek tragedies). His death is presented from the start of the play as a welcome rest for a wanderer after a long journey, metaphorical imagery that taps into a way of conceptualising death more broadly in Greek culture.[116] Even his blindness, though inflicted in exceptional circumstances, is representative of a universal human condition: 'LIFE IS UNCERTAIN';[117] count no man happy until

[114] See further Currie (2012: 343) on the similar impact on families of Oedipus' heroization and heroization of the Athenian war dead.
[115] See Loraux (2002: 87-90) on how tragedy provided the audience with an opportunity to mourn as individual members of humanity (as opposed to as citizens of a *polis* that restricted private mourning and funerals).
[116] Rest in death (and the Eumenides that can grant it) is 'sweet' for Oedipus: Tilg (2004b). On 'wandering and the human condition' in ancient Greece and Rome, see especially Montiglio (2005: 42-61) (though she acknowledges on p. 44 that the tragic wanderer is exceptional, not everyman). Journeying in Sophocles, Oedipus' quest 'for an *end*' and his 'last journey': Easterling (2011: esp. 73, 75, 78). Blundell (1989: 255), too, argues that 'the emphasis of the play is on death as the end'. See further Cole (1992: esp. xxxii-xxxv). The 'way' in early Greek imagery and thought: Becker (1937: esp. 210-12). On Oedipus' swift perfective death as set 'against the long time which has preceded it': Hutchinson (1999: 60). See further Carey (2009: 124) on how style in the ode in *OC* 1211-48 enacts the idea of 'waiting' for death (θάνατος ἐς τελευτάν, 1223, is delayed until the end of the sentence). On the central place of metaphor in human cognitive processes, see Lakoff and Johnson (2003).
[117] Housman (1988: 236-37), expressing, in parody, an essential principle of Greek tragedy.

he is dead.[118] In all these respects, old dying Oedipus might be every aged mortal.[119] In other ways, though, he is highly unusual, in life as well as death. Crucially, his death is not natural, but pre-ordained, and he will, ultimately, hold exceptional status as a hero.[120] In who he is and how he dies (and who he is once he is dead), Oedipus puts the porosity between ordinary and extraordinary under pressure.

But the epistemological point to which the *OC* draws attention is not just the extent to which encountering Oedipus's death specifically might illuminate a mystery. Instead, the questionable exemplarity of Oedipus' death turns a spotlight upon the desires and expectations of the living in the face of an existential problem. Why should *any* death be exemplary? After all, is any death ordinary?[121] In ancient Athens, some died in old age, some in battle, some in childbirth, some from disease. It was not just the war dead or cult heroes that disappeared without a material trace: cenotaphs might be used for a range of the dead, for people who died at sea, for example, or overseas.[122] And it was not just mythological characters whose bodies

[118] See Herodotus' Solon in the *Histories* 1.30-32. Note further the themes of the ode in *OC* 1211-48: life is uncertain, old age is wretched; never to be born is best, or else to die as soon as possible. On this ode, life and suffering, death and release, and overliving ('the worst thing of all'): Wilson (2004: 58-65). See further Easterling (2009: esp. 165), 'The syntax of the whole ode brings out very clearly the fact that what is true for Oedipus is true not only for him and for them, but for all humanity'; Trivigno (2018: esp. 219, 226) on the chorus of the *OC* on the goodness of death, as exemplified by Oedipus. Rutherford (2012: 280) finds a more questioning approach to Oedipus' exemplarity in the ode.

[119] Emphasising age in the *OC*: Cole (1992: xxxiii-xxxv); Wilson (1997: 5-8) (indeed, at pp. 8-11 he also argues for a theme of political 'old age', in that the *OC* 'provides an artistic closure to the era of classical Athens'); Budelmann (2000a: 80) on Oedipus' special relationship with time (he is, in this respect, unlike other men); Budelmann (2000b: 193) on Oedipus as cult-hero-to-be *and* old man; Kitcher (2018). Dhuga (2005), however, notes that the aged chorus of the *OC* are strikingly authoritative, which indicates that there is (in this play at least) no simple equation between age and infirmity. On a shift between general and specific meditation in the third ode, see Carey (2009: 128-29). Note especially 1239-41, where the chorus associate Oedipus' aged condition with their own. Paul Kitcher, in particular, emphasises that the *OC* is a '*human* tragedy'. On the exemplarity of Oedipus more generally, see, for example, Segal (1998: 141).

[120] Overliving as a human condition and 'the necessary precondition for tragedy' (and Oedipus' exceptional rehabilitation from this condition): Wilson (2004: esp. 41-42, 58-65).

[121] Death, 'the most uncertain of all certainties': Grieve (1898: 31).

[122] On disappearance as a Greek mythical-ritual model for heroic death, see Avezzù and Guidorizzi (2008: 378) on 1649. On cenotaphs, see Kurtz and Boardman (1971: 99-100).

exerted supernatural force after their death: Sophocles himself became the object of hero cult.[123] Perhaps the main way in which all deaths are alike is that every death is individual.

Indeed, exemplarity is at the heart of the *OC*, not just in its eponymous character, but in the life history that the play has accumulated in the thousands of years since it came into being. From the very beginning, the play has offered itself as an influential model for thinking about theatre and death. Written by Sophocles, a titan of Greek drama (and often, for ancient and modern critics alike, the exemplary ancient dramatist),[124] at the end of his own life and performed after his death, it could not help but propose some sort of analogy between the death that it contains and death more generally.[125] Produced at the end of the fifth century, it comprises the conscious and unconscious reflections of a dramatist upon almost a century of drama; it holds the tantalising promise of a lens onto the mediating role played by Greek tragedy in existential meditation. Moreover, since its first production, the play has continued to offer a sounding board for reflections on death.[126] Consider the echo of Oedipus' bath in Plato's *Phaedo* (discussed on page 187). Regardless of whether this was intended to be a direct reference to the text or performance of Sophocles' play, the recurrence of the motif (including within this thesis) is itself

[123] Jouanna (2018: 65-66).
[124] Goldhill (2012: 153).
[125] The play is also set in Sophocles' native deme: Radt (1977: 44) Testimonia 18. For Sophocles' biography, see especially Lefkowitz (1981: 75-87). See further Burton (1980: 291-92); Ringer (1998: 97-98); Kelly (2009: 9-14); Hesk (2012: 174); Jouanna (2018: 5-107). On connections between Sophocles' play and biography, see Wilamowitz (1917: 368-73); Bowra (1965: 307); Reinhardt (1979: 193-94); Segal (1981: 407-8); Edmunds (1996: 163-68); Calame (1998: 355-56); Markantonatos (2007: 9-21); Kelly (2009: 134); Currie (2012: 332); Van Nortwick (2012: 141); Scharffenberger (2017: 336-39).
[126] See especially Rodighiero (2007) on representations of Oedipus' mysterious death in the play's reception history, ranging from ancient Greece to the modern day. See further Markantonatos (2007: ch. 6); Kelly (2009: 134-37); Scharffenberger (2017) for a wide-ranging overview of the *OC*'s reception more generally. See Ryan (2010) on reception of the *OC* in the eighteenth century.

generative of thought on how a cultural product might engage, and continue to engage, in diffuse cultural reflections. Consider, further, the 2019 Cambridge Greek Play, in which the *OC* became 'one of the greatest plays about old age, the bearing of life's horror, and the transcendence of the ordinary'.[127] This more recent re-incarnation interacts not just with a fifth-century discourse, but with a web of interactions thereafter, including, explicitly, a discourse surrounding the Chilean dictator Pinochet. Implicitly, Pinochet dies not just like Oedipus, but like Socrates, and countless others. Oedipus too, in the *OC*, when he denies his daughter a corpse to bury, interacts with another situation in another play by Sophocles, when Antigone is kept from a body: the body of her brother Polynices.[128] Echoes of this kindred situation, future within the mythological world of the *OC*, past within the cultural world of fifth-century Athenian dramatic performances, juxtapose two deaths that are similar and different. Two bodies go unhonoured, unburied by their family; one betrayed his city, the other offers, in his death, a city's protection; one died young and violently, the other old and apparently without suffering; both have disappeared but both live on in cultural re-tellings.[129]

[127] The Cambridge Greek Play (2019).
[128] See Sophocles' *Antigone*. For a detailed treatment of the intertextual relationships between the *OC* and other plays, see Markantonatos (2007: ch. 5). See further Lamari (2009) on 'future reflexivity' in tragedy; Holmes (2013) on the 'volatility' of the final scene and the relationship between the *OC*, *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. On connections between the *OC* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (particularly in the Furies/Eumenides and themes of retribution and supplication), see especially Winnington-Ingram (1954); see further Bernek (2004: 69-219) on the *OC* as a suppliant drama (and its close relationship with Aeschylus' *Eumenides*) and Kelly (2009: chs. 3 and 5).
[129] Note Carey (2009: 133): 'Neither [the third stasimon] nor anything else in the play is offered as the last word.' Indeed, the ongoing life of the *OC* echoes the continued presence of both Oedipus and Sophocles as cult heroes. Perhaps this is anticipated in the language of the play: see Suksi (2001) on the nightingales' music in the grove at Colonus and how it reflects the transformative power of tragedy; the *OC* does not just represent death and grief, but turns them into art. Inconclusiveness is also a feature of Sophocles' style: see note 98.

The play then, puts pressure not just upon what normal might look like in the context of death, but upon the role played by culture in meditating that question. Yes, every death might be idiosyncratic, as might every encounter with another's death (real or represented). But, in the face of that idiosyncrasy, a play like the *OC* can construct some sort of shared encounter with death by offering everyone common ingredients and by inviting them to draw analogies.[130] Oedipus (like everyone) is unusual in his death, but one of the ways in which his death is unusual also gives it potential to stand not just as an instance, but as an example of death: it is thoroughly known to all.

[130] See Budelmann (2000a: 61-91) on the shared perspective invited by Sophocles' characters.

CHAPTER FOUR

VICTORY, VICTORY, VICTORY:

DEATH AND THE WEST FRIEZE

OF THE TEMPLE OF ATHENA NIKE

> No longer conceived of as a *mimesis* of a unique event (albeit with universal implications), the narrative here becomes a repeated affirmation, a rhetorical statement and restatement of a single abstract concept: victory, victory, victory.[1]
>
> The Temple of Athena Nike melds history and myth in a hymn of victory. From the shields captured from the Spartans recently affixed to the bastion, to the battles against the Persians, to the mythic exploits on the west and north friezes, the imagery illustrates continuous Athenian success.[2]

There is a material, but problematic, difference between wanting to look at actual corpses—a matter for shame and disgust, 'look for yourselves, you wretches, and take your fill of the beautiful sight!'[3]—and wanting to look at sculptures of dead bodies.[4] The temple of Athena Nike is covered in battle slaughter and stone-cold corpses but is generally considered a thing of beauty: the 'pearl of the Acropolis'.[5] Consider Maria Brouskari's description:

> The temple of Athena Nike seems to hang in the light, a miniature masterpiece high on the bastion at the south-west edge of the Acropolis. A lighter note in the heroic symphony of the Propylaia nearby, a smile answering its sobriety, it blends harmoniously with that monument.[6]

[1] Stewart (1985: 67).
[2] Arrington (2015: 176).
[3] Pl. *Resp.* 4.440a3-4.
[4] The complexities of representation, reality and cruelty (encompassing the art of death): Nelson (2011). Aestheticisation of the shocking in the arts, and Euripides' commentary upon it: Shirazi (2020: 109).
[5] A 'jewel box': Goette (2001: 22).
[6] Brouskari (1997: 73).

There *is* a difference (not least one of ontology), but the two experiences are not entirely distinct;[7] just because death is not 'really there' on a temple frieze—what is visible and present is stone, paint and images—does not mean it is out of the mental picture. And there is no ignoring death in the sanctuary of Athena Nike. Sculpted into a temple built on land that was ravaged by the Persians,[8] a temple doubly wreathed in scenes of slaughter—battle on its friezes, sacrifice on its balustrade—'Death august and royal, sings sorrow up into immortal spheres'.[9] Sculpted bodies that struggle, slay, safeguard and succumb mingle grief and loss with the beauty of an art form that remembers, honours and celebrates.

In the previous chapter, I considered how the advent and moment of death is made mentally present and visible in Sophocles' *OC*. The subject of this chapter, temple sculpture, is another public medium that (in the classical period at least) also showcases bodies. A major point of difference is that in sculpture the bodies are not real; they are represented in painted stone. At the same time, they are emphatically, materially, present (in a way that the Messenger's word-image of Oedipus' dying body is not). This double act (material presence, bodily absence) accommodates distinctive reflections on the concept of death. The presence of cold, hard, immobile stone, for example, puts pressure on the potential for all persons to become a cold, stiff, motionless object.[10] It also prompts an affective encounter with death as

[7] Sometimes there are troubling crossovers. Consider the plaster casts of the dead from Pompeii, displayed in the Ashmolean exhibition 'Last Supper in Pompeii' (July 2019-January 2020), but segregated from the other artefacts.
[8] Memorialising and forgetting on the Acropolis after the Persian destruction (and representations of the cost of victory in its sculpture): Kousser (2009). She does not focus on the temple of Athena Nike.
[9] From 'For the Fallen', by Laurence Binyon (1914).
[10] Scholarship on materiality, senses and the body has drawn attention to the corporeality of death: it is of the body to die and decay. See note 55 on page 32, note 6 on page 80, and notes 10 and 87 on pages 159 and 185-86 (especially on Bassi (2018)).

absence, owing to the impossibility of interacting with a real body, for which the stone body is a substitute or memento (like a corpse for a person).

But is visible presence of dead bodies essential for death to be visualised, especially in a battle scene? Observing in his doctoral thesis that corpses hold a less central position on the Nike friezes than on the Parthenon metopes, Nathan Arrington commented: 'Here, death is cloaked, concealed, or transformed.'[11] Is this true? As Socrates jokes in the *Phaedo*, corpses are not necessarily good to think with when it comes to the concept of death ('[bury me] any way you like—if you can catch me, that is, and I don't slip through your fingers!' 115c). How concrete a symbol do we need to notice death on a temple?

I focus on the west frieze of the temple of Athena Nike, incorporating details from the rest of the temple and sanctuary complex.[12] This small and ornate temple perches upon a bastion at the south side of the Propylaia gateway, on the west side of the sacred citadel of Athens (FIGURES 4.1 AND 4.2).[13]

[11] Arrington (2010: 103) (on the west frieze). The absence of this point in Arrington (2015: 172-76) suggests that he revised his opinion. Either way, the leap from less obvious corpses to less obvious death is perilous.
[12] Two central blocks (*i* and *k*) are in the British Museum: 1816,0610.160 and 1816,0610.161. The corner blocks are in the Acropolis Museum: 18143 and 18139. Any temple sculpture is part of a larger entity: not just the temple building, but also the sanctuary space, including, for example, altars, boundaries and votive statues. It therefore exists in a sacred space that frames responses to it. The rhetorical unity of the 'sculptural program' of the temple's friezes, pediments, *acroteria* and balustrade: Stewart (1985). An overview of the temple and sanctuary complex: Brouskari (1997: 71-87). Bibliography: Travlos (1988: 28).
[13] History of the Acropolis: Goette (2001: 5-16, 21-23).

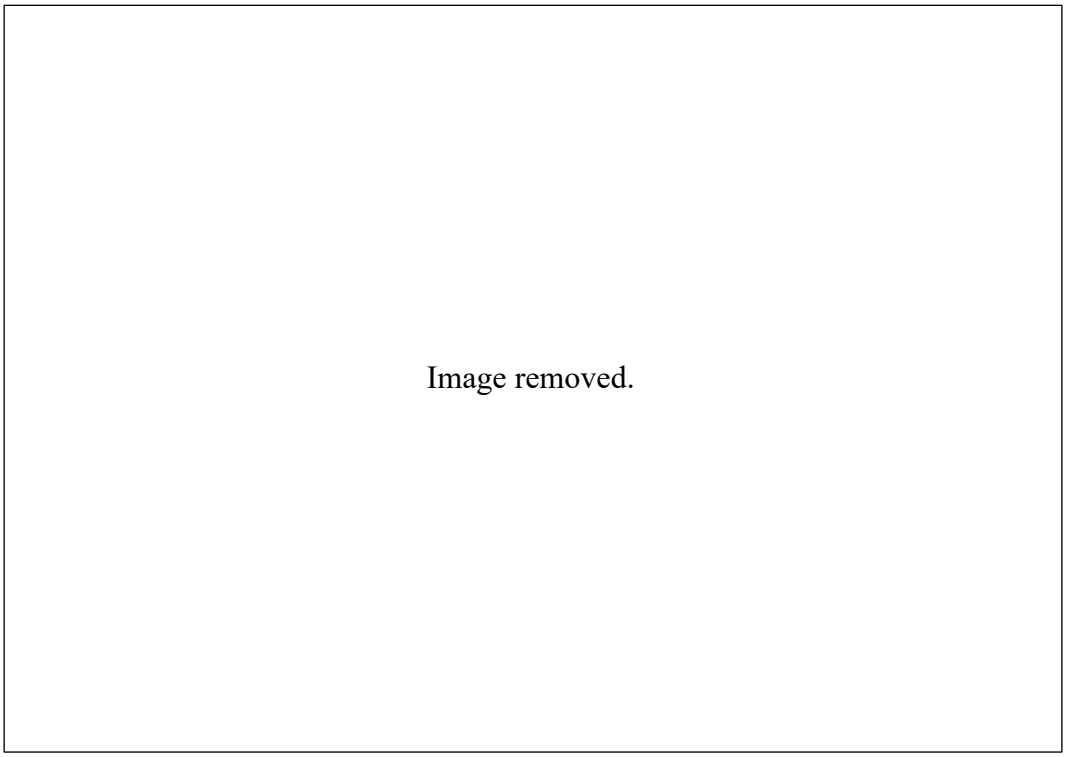


FIGURE 4.1

Photograph taken from the north west, showing the view of the west frieze from below.

Image: Travlos (1971: 153, fig. 204).

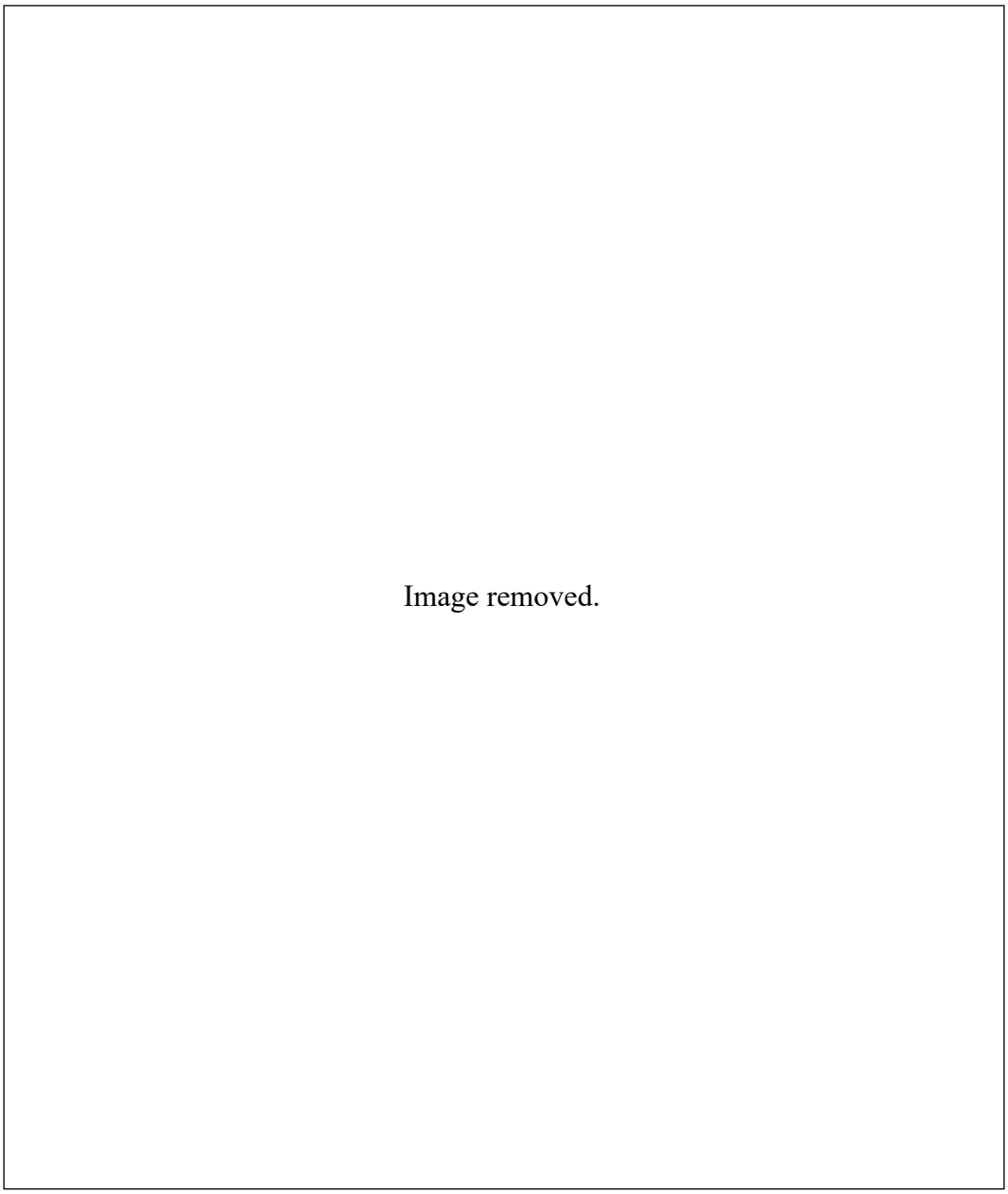


FIGURE 4.2

Restoration of the Acropolis, by G. P. Stevens.

Image: American School of Classical Studies, Athens, as printed in Rhodes (1995: 141, fig. 74).

Designed with four-columned porticoes on eastern and western ends (*tetrastyle amphiprostyle*), it was decorated on its exterior with four continuous friezes in high relief (one on each side); sculptures in both pediments; and, probably, gilded bronze statue groups (*akroteria*) on the apex and corners.[14] Within it stood a cult image of Athena Nike,[15] and around it, enclosing the sanctuary on three of its boundaries to the north, south and west, ran a balustrade sculpted in relief with images of Nike figures bringing offerings towards seated Athenas.[16]

Traditional approaches to this temple mostly focus on two controversial issues: its construction (somewhere between 435—more likely 426—and 421 BCE) and reconstructions,[17] and the subject of its friezes—were they mythological or historical, and to which play, myth, battle or event should they be matched?[18] Most

[14] *acroteria*: Boulter (1969); Schultz (2001). Pediments: Despinis (1974); Brouskari (1989); Ehrhardt (1989). See further Shear (2016: 355-56). On the friezes, see note 18.

[15] Overview of the (uncertainty surrounding the) religious cult of Nike: Brouskari (1997: 73-74). Nike, an abstract concept (victory), was often associated with other divinities such as Athena and Zeus, but was also a deity in her own right: Hamdorf (1964: 58-62); Lonis (1979: 231-61); Ducrey (1985: 264). Note the narrower view in Baudrillart (1894: 5-21, esp. 7) that Nike was an 'offshoot' of Athena, qualified in Daly (1953). There is some evidence for a cult of Athena Nike in the early sixth century (an archaic statue base and later references in Heliodorus and Pausanias to a *xoanon* of a wingless Athena Nike): Mark (1993: 123-24). Evidence for the independent cult of Nike dates later than the fifth century: Daly (1953: 1124). The Nike figure in Greek art: Isler-Kerényi (1969) (archaic period); Gulaki (1981) (classical period).

[16] The balustrade: Michaelis (1862); Kekulé (1869), (1881); Jameson (1994); Hölscher (1997); Simon (1985: 280-86), (1997); Brouskari (1999).

[17] A detailed construction history: Mark (1993). See further Michaelis (1862) (the balustrade); Furtwängler (1895: 442-51); Travlos (1971: 148-49) (an overview); Miles (1980: 323-25); Wesenberg (1981); Mattingly (1982), (2000); Childs (1985) (though he focuses mostly on the temple on the Ilissos); Shear (1999: 120-25); Gill (2001) (the Nike temple decree); Shear (2016: 27-35). History of the temple site, alterations, and restoration issues: Giraud (1994). A reconstruction history of the temple: de Bree (2010).

[18] A summary of frieze interpretations: Palagia (2005). Evelyn Harrison has written extensively on the frieze subjects: (1972b) (south frieze) (the battle of Marathon), (1972a) (north frieze) (the battle of Plataea), (1997: esp. 117-22). Some further interpretations: Furtwängler (1895: 445-50) (the battle of Plataea on north, west and south friezes); Blümel (1950/51) (Greeks versus Persians on south; Greeks versus Greeks on north and west); Pemberton (1972: esp. 304-7) (Athenian defeat of the Corinthians at Megara on the west frieze); Felten (1984: 123-31, esp. 128-29) (mythological themes on the north and west sides, specifically the Trojan War); Simon (1985: 275) (victories on the north and west friezes, respectively, over Boeotians and Peloponnesians in general); Stewart (1985: 55-67, esp. 55, Table 1) (universalising, allegorical rhetoric in the temple complex); Palagia (2005) (east frieze shows the birth of Athena); Schultz (2009) (supporting Harrison's interpretation of the north frieze as representing the battle for the Herakleidai); Shear (2016: 354-55) (providing a

scholars agree, however, on one thing: the temple is all about victory: 'victory, victory, victory', whether martial, political, cultural or ethical (see the epigraphs to this chapter).[19] This accords with a dominant thread in scholarship on the classical Acropolis (especially the Parthenon), namely that its sacred space is a place of Athenian self-definition, self-promotion and self-celebration.[20] Though this socio-political goal is (implicitly or explicitly) compatible with a sacred purpose of celebrating the goddess of the city, there has been less attention to more existential questions. Notable exceptions are Nathan Arrington's work on the fallen warrior and Rachel Kousser's article on mourning and memory on the Acropolis.[21] There is, however, more to be said, specifically on the temple of Athena Nike, and generally on how temple sculpture prompts meditation on death.

In particular, my slant differs from traditional approaches to this temple in two ways. First, I wish to place a question mark over the specificity (temporal, spatial, socio-political) of the sculptural representations—that is, to think in terms of plausible possibilities, and to treat the images as generative of multiple ideas, partly by considering how they are in dialogue with representations elsewhere in Athenian culture. It is the productive nature of these sculptural images that makes them so

comprehensive summary of proposals, and favouring specific, but no longer identifiable, historical battles). These discussions form an important backdrop to my discussion, but mostly have a different focus. Note, in contrast, Hölscher (1973: 91-98), (1997: 146), arguing for more generic battles (albeit Greek versus Persian or Greek versus Greek) on the friezes. See further Osborne (2017: 449) on how the Nike south frieze conjures 'the broad nature of the conflict', not particular individuals.

[19] For example: Boulter (1969: 133); Mattingly (1982: 384); Stewart (1985: esp. 67) (quoted in the epigraph to this chapter); Simon (1997); Palagia (2005: 190); Martin-McAuliffe and Papadopoulos (2012: 346); Trundle (2013: 124); Shear (2016: 341-58). Ethical victory on the west frieze: Harrison (1997: 121); Karakas (2002: 53-55, 157); Arrington (2010: 102-4), (2015: 172-76) (the latter is quoted in the epigraph to this chapter).

[20] See for example Rhodes (1995: esp. 1-2, 115-16); Hurwit (1999: 230); Schwab (2005).

[21] Kousser (2009); Arrington (2010), (2015); note 8.

powerful a springboard for meditations on death.[22] Second, I wish to complicate the ways in which this temple deals with victory, which is not a flat concept but rather bound up with defeat and death (especially when viewed in a war-time context).[23] This latter point is not controversial,[24] but seems to have been lost in many scholarly responses to this temple.

I look first at the relationships between visibility and visualisation of death on the west frieze: what does it take to notice death in a sculpted battle scene? How does the medium prompt reflection on the imaginative nature of encountering death? Then, turning to the frieze's immediate and wider settings, I consider how the sacred-mythological backdrop contributes to existential and epistemological meditation. Finally, I discuss the image of a trophy, which is set within an ongoing battle scene and so becomes an ambivalent symbol of crisis. How does this trophy draw attention to existential stakes within, and beyond, the figured scene?

[22] Important here is Marconi (2004b: esp. 211) on *kosmos* as temple decoration *and* the organisation of the world. See especially Neer (2013: 458): 'orderly architecture might provide a *model* for at least some Greek conceptions of a cosmically ordered universe'. The sacred frame of the temple and thanatological order: Arrington (2015: 133). Note, further, Hölscher (1997: 157-63) on 'konzeptuelle Bildsprache' on the Nike balustrade, popular for political purposes but also used more widely.

[23] Compare Shear (2016: 358): 'the image of Athenian triumph conveyed by the battle friezes of the Nike temple seems increasingly out of touch with the realities of contemporary warfare, as the long years of the Peloponnesian War dragged on'. Perhaps it is the reception of the temple that is out of touch.

[24] Victory and defeat as 'fluid conditions': Turner and Clark (2018: 6). See further Foster (2018: 101), who, as part of an argument that much of the visual and verbal media of classical Athens (historiography excluded) avoids direct mention of defeat, acknowledges that temple decoration shows the 'labors and dangers' endured for the sake of victory. See note 8.

Consider the sculptural representations on the west frieze (FIGURES 4.3A-I).

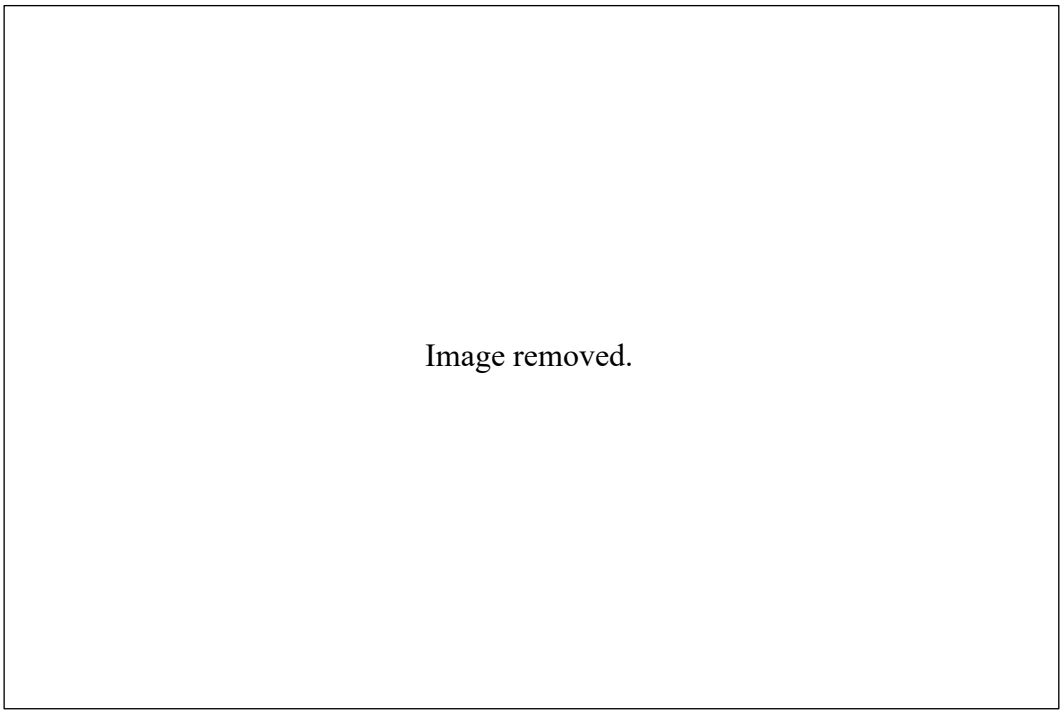


FIGURE 4.3A

Corner block *h* from the west frieze of the temple of Athena Nike (scene 1).

426-421 BCE. Length: 52.5cm.

Acropolis Museum, Athens: Acr. 18143 (west side).

Image: Acropolis Museum.

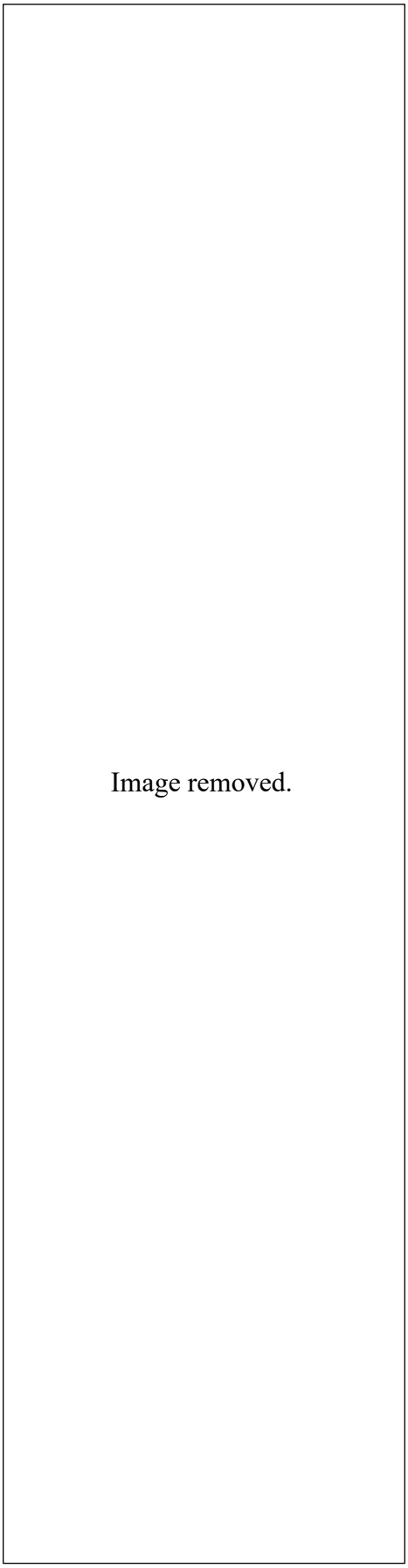


FIGURE 4.3B

Block *i* from the west frieze of the temple of Athena Nike (scenes 2, 3, 4 and 5).

426-421 BCE.

Length 205cm, Height 44.45cm.

British Museum, London: 1816,0610.160.

Image: British Museum.

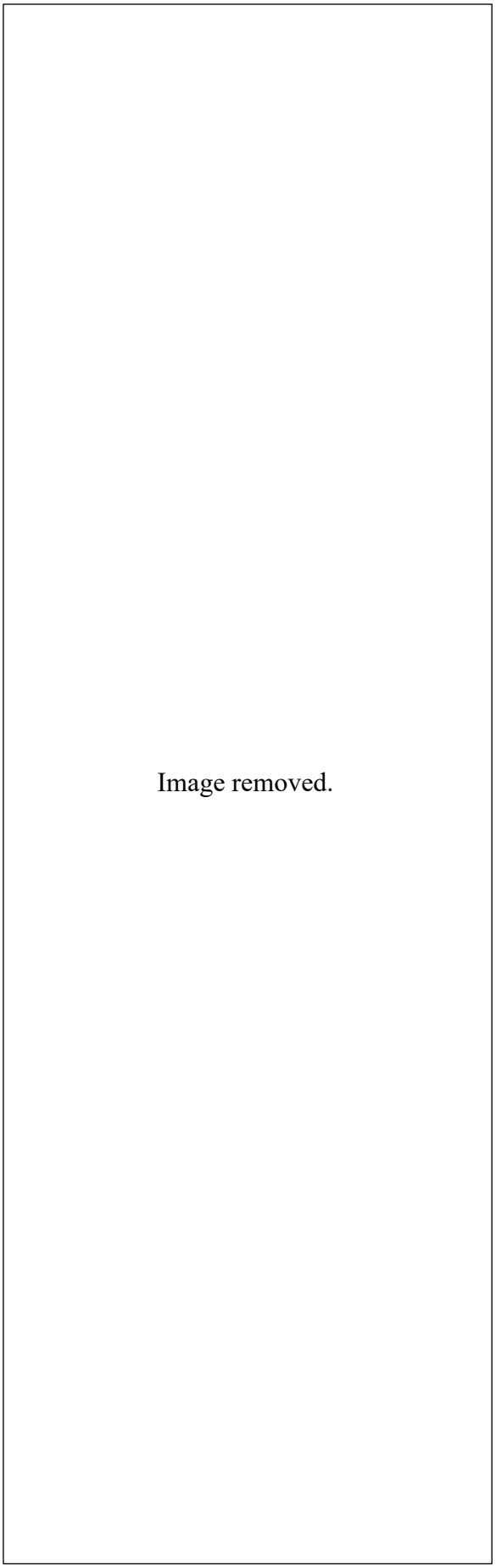


FIGURE 4.3C

Block *k* from the west frieze of the temple of Athena Nike (scenes 5, 6, 7 and 8).

426-421 BCE.

Length 205cm, Height 44.45cm.

British Museum, London: 1816,0610.161.

Image: British Museum.

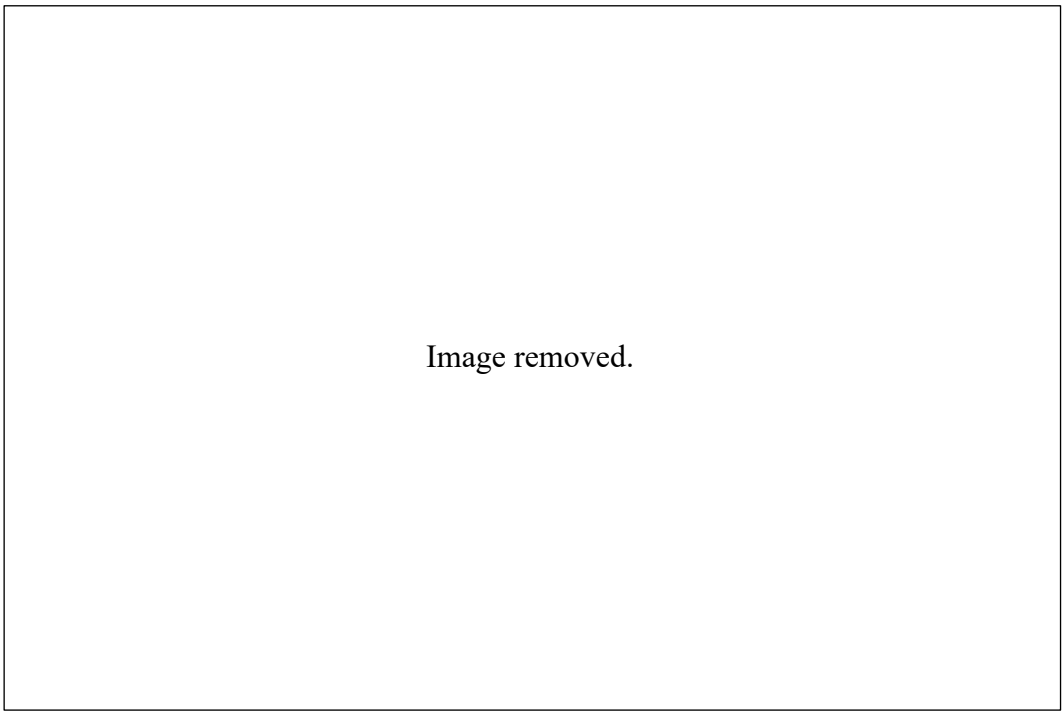


FIGURE 4.3D

Corner block *l* from the west frieze of the temple of Athena Nike (scene 8).

426-421 BCE. Length 43.5cm, Height 41cm.

Acropolis Museum, Athens: Acr. 18139 (west side).

Image: Acropolis Museum.

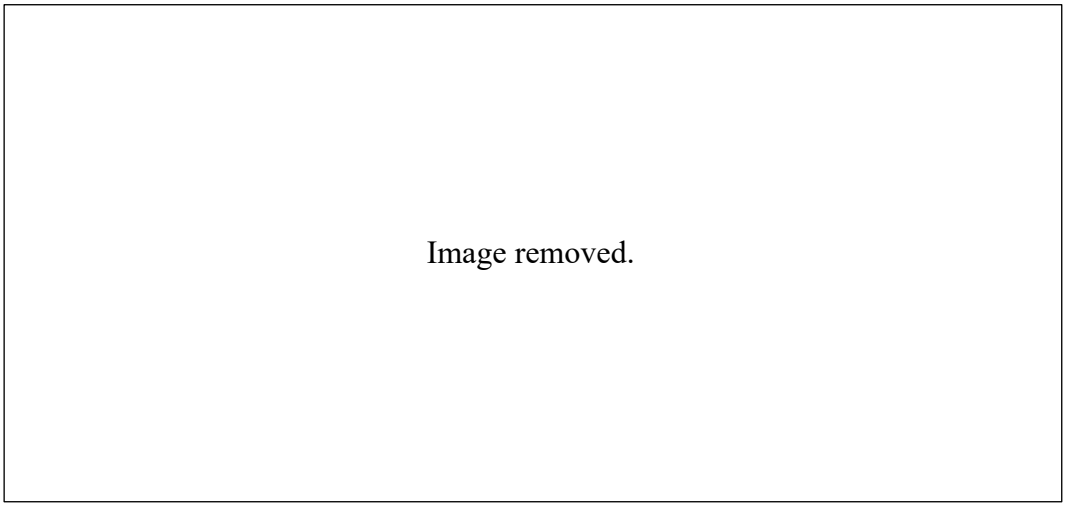


FIGURE 4.3E

Detail (left half) from block *i* (scenes 2 and 3).

See caption for FIGURE 4.3B.

Image: British Museum.

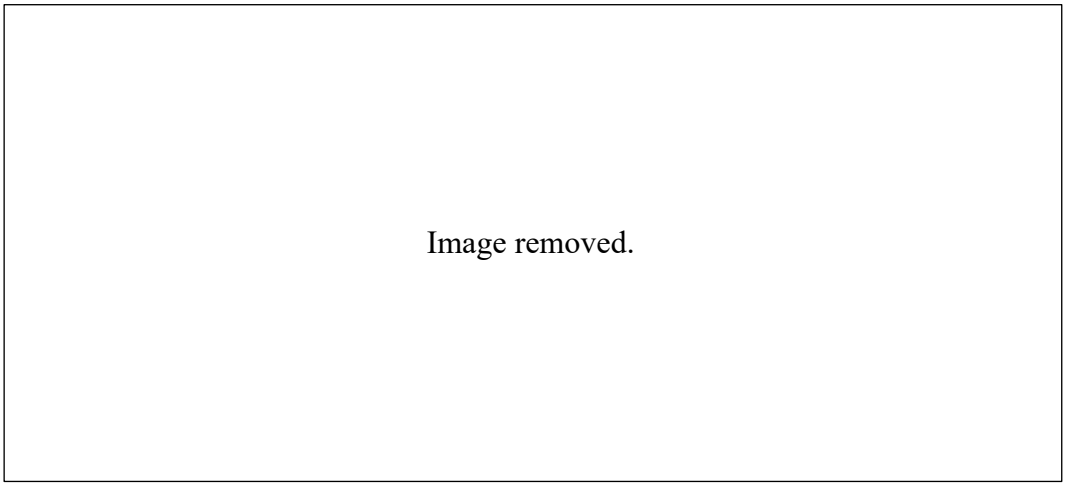


FIGURE 4.3F

Detail (right half) from block *i* (scenes 4 and 5).

See caption for FIGURE 4.3B.

Image: British Museum.

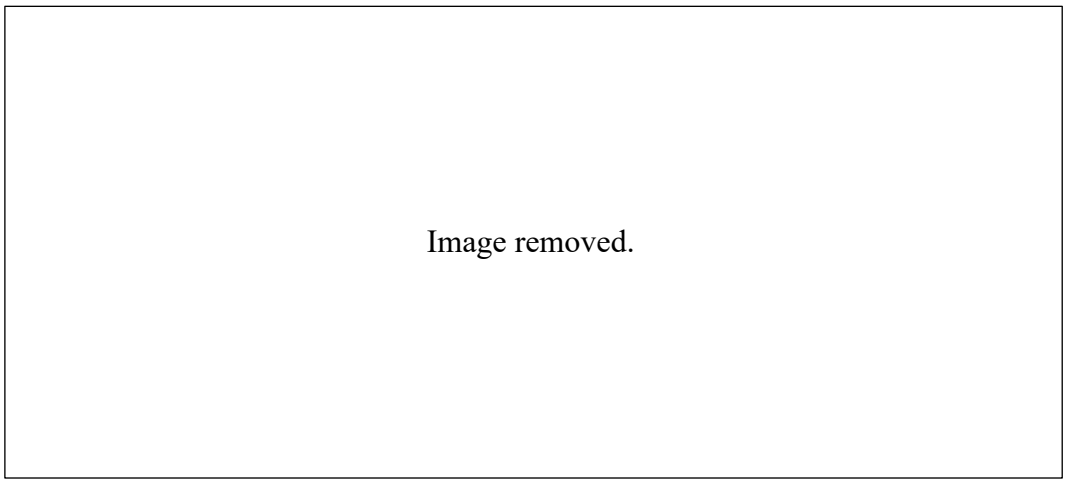


FIGURE 4.3G

Detail (left half) from block *k* (scenes 5 and 6).

See caption for FIGURE 4.3C.

Image: British Museum.

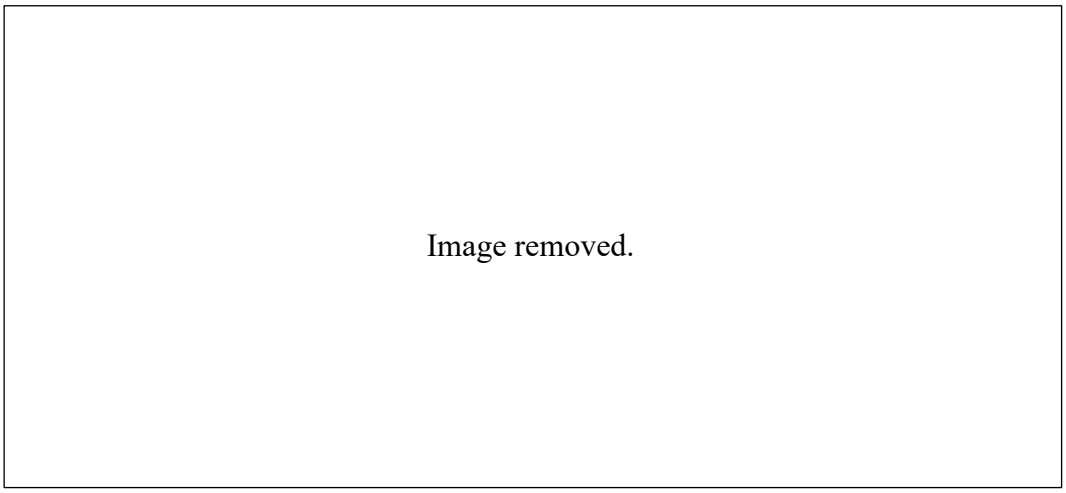


FIGURE 4.3H

Detail (right half) from block *k* (scenes 6, 7 and 8).

See caption for FIGURE 4.3C.

Image: British Museum.

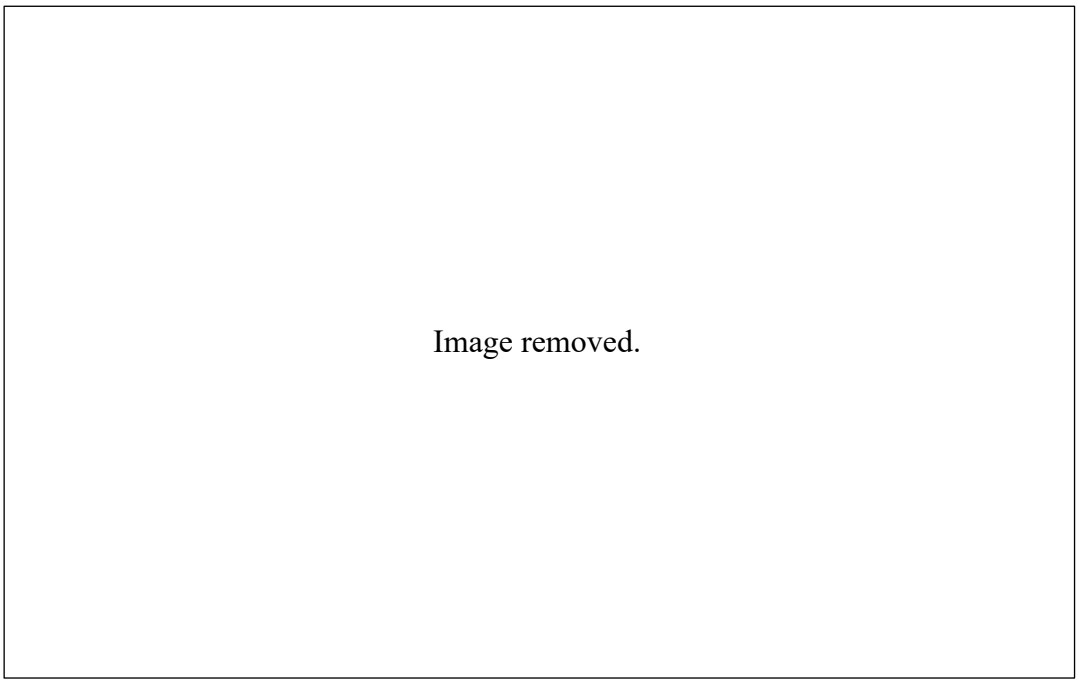


FIGURE 4.3I

Detail (corpse) from block *i* (scene 3).

See caption for FIGURE 4.3B.

Image: British Museum.

Together, the images form a continuous whole (a typical feature of an ionic frieze): they show a battle scene in progress. In tension with this high-level cohesion is the composition of the frieze into vignettes, local scenes that play out between individuals amidst the wider political conflict (TABLE 1). In the third part of this chapter, I will examine how this episodic format puts a distinctive spin on existential reflection; for the moment, let us take a closer look at some of the scenes, and how they generate encounters with death. It is worth stressing now that, despite the emphasis in scholarship on victory, it is not a stretch to think about death in response to this frieze. Death is thoroughly present throughout, not just because some bodies are visibly dead or dying, but because most figures are striving to kill

and not be killed. All figures on this frieze face an existential crisis. As elsewhere in this thesis, the question in this part of the chapter is not so much whether death is relevant on this frieze (it manifestly is), but how the sculptural medium shapes encounters with it and prompts epistemological reflections.

TABLE 1			
SCENE	FIGURE	OBJECT	REPRESENTATION
1	4.3A	Block *h*	Two figures with hoplite shields move towards the right (into battle). Death is conceivable as a future event.
2	4.3B, 4.3E	Block *i*	Two nude figures with hoplite shields lunge away from one another above a nude figure upon the ground. This figure appears to be wounded or in a vulnerable position; he may be dying.
3	4.3B, 4.3E, 4.3I	Block *i*	Two nude figures with hoplite shields face one another above a nude body outstretched behind a rock, and apparently dead.
4	4.3B, 4.3F	Block *i*	One nude figure leaps above another that lies upon the ground, his torso partly raised upon his left elbow. It is unclear whether the latter is falling or getting back up. Behind the figures is a trophy consisting of a shield upon a tree.
5	4.3B, 4.3C,	Blocks *i*/*k*	Two figures leap and run towards the right; another is braced against them. These figures are vigorous and very much alive. They are about to

	4.3F, 4.3G		meet in conflict: death is conceivable (especially since the confrontation is unequal).
6	4.3C, 4.3G, 4.3H	Block *k*	There are six figures in total. Three figures, one nude, two draped, are in motion. They fight over the outstretched body of a nude warrior (wounded, perhaps dying, perhaps dead). Another nude figure bends to lift the body; another arcs with his shield above the body, perhaps protecting it from attack.
7	4.3C, 4.3H	Block *k*	Two figures lunge above another nude figure that kneels, braced upon the ground, and raises his shield in defence. The latter is in a vulnerable position.
8	4.3C, 4.3D, 4.3H	Block *l*	One draped figure moves to the right, apparently to support another, who is locked shield-to-shield with his opponent.

I begin at the obvious end of the spectrum, with bodies of the dead and dying. Death (its prelude or aftermath) is visibly represented on the west frieze by the presence of three fallen bodies in scenes 2, 3 and 6 (see especially FIGURES 4.3E, G, H AND I). (I set aside, for now, the figure below the trophy, who is supporting himself on his left elbow and is unambiguously alive, but may be wounded and is in a precarious position.) These fallen bodies are differentiated by their languid inertia and sprawling vulnerability; where other figures stride and lunge, attack and defend, wield weapons and shields, their bodies clear to see and set against waves of rippling drapery and circular shields, these three are relaxed, the curving lines of

their bodies forming gentle hollows (those on either end are lifted into a concave dish, the second curls inwards towards the viewer). The flowing curves of their bodies echo the undulations of the drapery: these figures look like men but behave (or, rather, respond) like objects. This passivity dovetails with their vulnerability: they must be screened from attack by the bodies and shields of those above them. It does not matter whether they are dead (most scholars think they are) or incapacitated by wounds. Either way, they are shown to be on the point of departure from their sculpted world: the first and the last are lifted from the ground; the other sinks out of view, partially concealed by a rock. To the extent that a corpse marks death, death here is clear to see and uncomplicated.

But death is also visualised on the frieze in manners that transcend, and complicate, the visible spectacle of the corpse. Consider the fallen figure on the left-hand side of block *i* (scene 3, FIGURES 4.3E AND 4.3I). This body lies outstretched behind a rock, his nude torso twisted and curled, his legs and genitals in a frontal view, and his chest tilted away so the upper body sprawls on its back. The partial concealment of his body complicates the relationship between perception and knowledge. The corpse—visible evidence that death has occurred—is somewhat obscured from view.[25] But does this concealment make it more or less difficult to know that this figure has died? Adopting a less literal approach, the rock that cloaks and conceals operates like a visible and material metonym for the metaphorical veil that covers a warrior's eyes at death's conclusion, smothering his senses, as when Sarpedon dies in the *Iliad* (16.502-3):[26]

Ὣς ἄρα μιν εἰπόντα τέλος θανάτοιο κάλυψεν

[25] See note 11.
[26] This is also reminiscent of the veiling of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* (chapter one) and of Ajax on the Getty cup (chapter two).

> ὀφθαλμοὺς ῥῖνάς θ'·
>
> He spoke and in that moment the consummation of death covered his eyes and nostrils…

Moreover, thinking back to my discussion of *lekythoi* in chapter two, the body that recedes from view engages with the problematic relationship between death and representation. This body is visible and invisible, present and absent. Like a real or painted funerary monument, and painted figures at the grave, the sculpted presence of the corpse on this frieze offers viewers a sensory and affective encounter with a person (not *this* sculpted ex-person, as such, but a person, perhaps a loved one that will fight, is fighting, has fought in battle—who might die, has died, or might have died); the rock that blocks reminds that this encounter is fleeting and contingent upon a viewer's relationship with the image.[27]

The sculpted stone medium adds to this effect because stone is not just what conceals the corpse, but what reveals it—even constitutes it. Put bluntly, this represented corpse is just as much of a stone as the represented stone in front of it. Even allowing for paint, which would have clarified the distinction between three different stone ontologies (background, body and rock), the overlap suggests a permeability between different cold, inert and senseless layers.[28] Body as rock simulates person as body, body as flesh, or, in Maggie Nelson's words, 'meat':

> The spectre of our eventual "becoming object"—of our (live) flesh one day turning into (dead) meat—is a shadow that accompanies us throughout our lives.[29]

[27] See notes 55, 56, 57 on pages 32-33.
[28] The killing force that 'turns a man into a stone': Weil (2005: 5).
[29] Nelson (2011: 175).

The very matter of the medium thus presents death as stone-like; the stoniness of the representation turns attention upon the material transformation in a person that has died.[30]

By both showing and hiding a corpse in its sculpted representations and within the substance of its marble fabric, the frieze turns attention upon the imaginative processes at play in contemplating death and the dead in response to a perceptible object.[31] Perhaps one point is the interface between what is and is not perceptible (and the relationship between both of these and knowability). As Nathan Arrington observed, on this temple, 'the fallen Athenian warrior recedes into the background'.[32] But where Arrington emphasised the transformation of the fallen warrior into a scene of ethical victory, I would emphasise, instead, that a body concealed (or, rather, partially concealed) is not death unnoticed.[33] The corpse that sinks out of view (a corpse that, depending upon what story a viewer might choose to read into the image, might well be Athenian) echoes an epistemological problem with a sensory one. Is this death? Would it make a difference if we could see the whole body? Would it make a difference if the body was real, not graven?

By way of contrast, let us turn to a scene on the west frieze in which no dead bodies are shown: scene 7 (FIGURES 4.3C AND 4.3H). Positioned at the far-right end of block *k*, the scene should be visualised either near the south end of the frieze or just left

[30] On the complexities of this statement in the light of new materialist critique, see Wohl (2018: 20) on the death of Astyanax in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, 'while death reduces living beings to inert matter, it also releases a vitality latent within the inanimate'.
[31] See note 26.
[32] Arrington (2010: 104). See page 203 (including note 11).
[33] Indeed, 'death' is *always* cloaked in some way. This is the premise upon which my thesis is based. See note 8 on page 7.

of the centre.[34] Viewers are presented with a cluster of three fighting male figures. On the left, one nude figure, shown in three quarters view from the rear, moves swiftly towards the right, his left arm outstretched and covered by his cloak (*chlamys*), which streams behind his body, rippling in waves from his shoulder to indicate his motion.[35] His right arm does not survive but may have hung by his side (though, if so, few traces appear below his rib cage). Head tilted forwards, he directs his gaze down upon another nude figure who squats in rear view, resting on his right knee with his left foot braced upon the ground and his shield held up between them.[36] Behind the crouched figure another stands tall, stretching his torso and two arms upwards with his left elbow bent back over his head to deliver a killing blow from above. To the right, a clothed fourth figure is discernible, and appears to move away from the group, but the top part of the frieze is lost so the composition is unclear.[37] There is an object upon the ground beside one of his feet (a rock, a helmet, a head…?).

Corpses are not present or visible in this snapshot in any literal way. All figures are vigorously alive and the scene is one of rippling muscles and fabric. But it would be pedantic to insist that the concept of death is absent. It is suggested to viewers by the precarious imbalance of the scene: two against one, the disadvantage of the lower position, the defensive raise of the shield. Death is hinted to be in the minds of the sculpted figures: the determined purpose of the would-be killers, the dreaded

[34] This block is usually visualised on the right hand of the west frieze in accordance with the 1787 reconstruction drawings by J. Stuart and N. Revett (followed, for example, in Blümel (1923: 27-30, pls. I-III)) and the current display of the originals in the British Museum and copies *in situ*. However, the 1994 study undertaken by Dimosthenis Giraud argues in favour of switching blocks *i* and *k* such that the right-hand end of block *k* would reach the centre of the frieze: Giraud (1994: 315-16).
[35] On rippling cloaks and motion in Graeco-Roman art, see Hutchinson (2020: 8-10).
[36] This is one of only three shields on the frieze that show their exterior to the viewer.
[37] I include this fourth figure in scene 8; see Table 1.

experience from which the victim strives to defend himself—in the words of Simone Weil, 'this person becomes a corpse before anybody or anything touches him.'[38] The possibility of death is sculpted into the scene and anticipated by viewers in response.

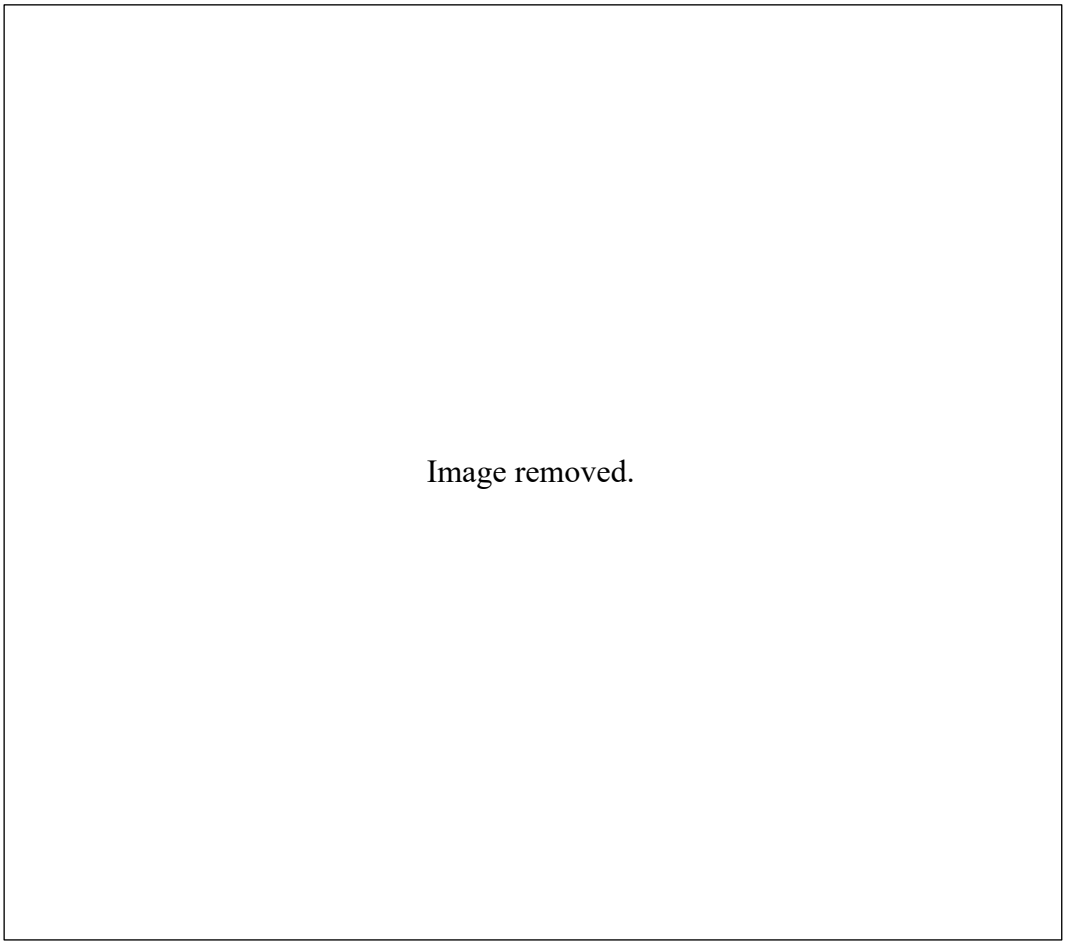


FIGURE 4.4

Attic red-figure *oinochoe* fragments. c. 425-375 BCE. Length 16cm, Width 14cm.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: 98.936.

Image: Museum of Fine Arts.

[38] Weil (2005: 5).

More interesting here is the fact that the scene's composition carries powerful and complicated connotations of death when set against the visual repertoire of classical Athens. The killers' stance is strongly reminiscent of the Tyrannicide pose that spread with popularity in the fifth century and beyond.[39] The left-hand figure—*chlamys* streaming from his outstretched left arm; nude body lunging forwards with his weight on his front leg—offers a reverse view of Aristogeiton (left leg forwards in copies such as the red-figure *oinochoe* fragments in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (FIGURE 4.4);[40] right leg forwards in the frieze, flipping his body from frontal to rear view). His partner, too, with his bent-back arms, prepares to strike the so-called 'Harmodios blow' (as preserved in some reproductions, at least).[41] The pose has come to stand for the triumph of democracy (and death of an old regime), a message in line with dominant readings of the Nike temple as an Athenian victory monument. But as a symbol it is far from problematic; even setting aside the Tyrannicide monument's monumental problems of authenticity, the statue group participates in a 'tissue of lies' at a political and existential level.[42] The icon of democratic victory is also one of attempted slaughter, failure, torture and death: the deaths of the would-be killers and their victim were re-presented under the sculpted guise of spirited life and the triumph of a fictionalised decisive moment in Athenian

[39] In addition, Harrison (1972b: 353-55) has argued in favour of a Harmodios pose on the south frieze (usually interpreted as Greeks versus Persians, or the battle of Marathon/Plataea). This is followed in Shear (2016: 353), 'In the sculptor's vivid imagery, the Athenian general [Kallimachos] impersonates a tyrannicide and strikes a blow for liberty' and Tanner (2018: 284), who focuses on the 'ethics of violence in the service of freedom'.
[40] *BAPD* 1337.
[41] The arm may also be extended and raised, as in the marble Roman version held in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, inv. nos. 6009/6010. In other versions, it is bent back, as in a plaster-cast reconstruction in the Museo dei Gessi (Azoulay (2017: fig. 3.3)) and on a shield emblem of a fifth-century black-figure Panathenaic amphora held in the British Museum, inv. no. 1866.0415.246.
[42] Authenticity and Classical Art (especially the Tyrannicides): Vout (2018: 1-19), especially p. 1 on the 'tissue of lies' constructed by their caption in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. A history of the Tyrannicides and their controversies: Azoulay (2017).

political history.[43] Compare the Harmodios-like pose struck by Neoptolemus on a column-krater at the Muzeo di Villa Giulia (FIGURE 4.5).[44]

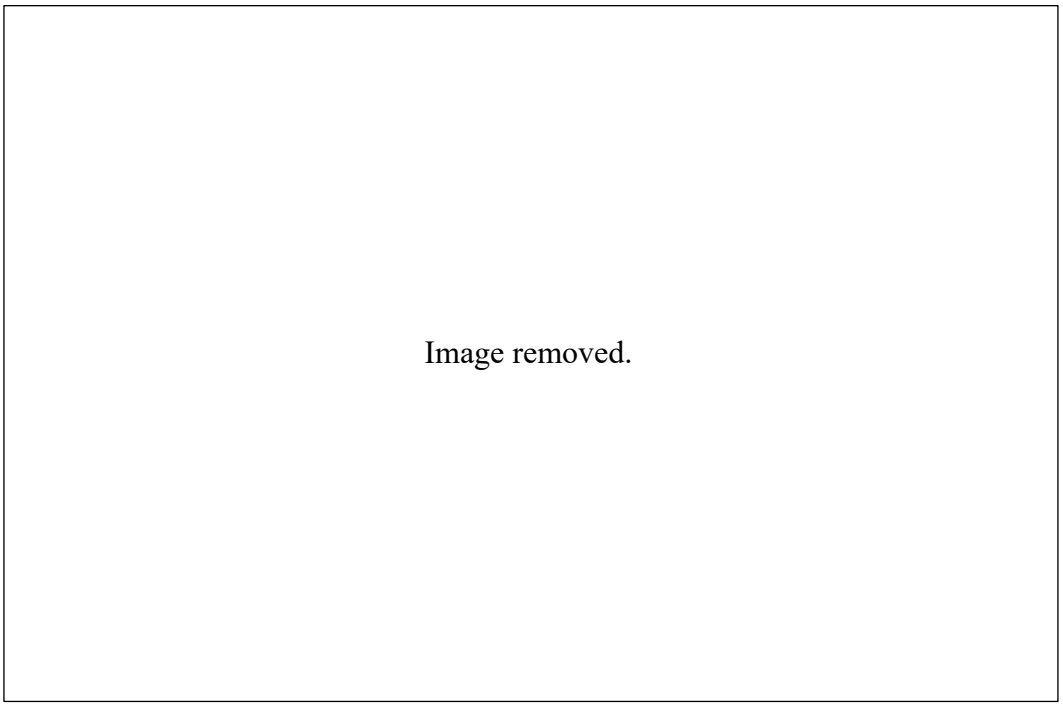


FIGURE 4.5

Red-figure krater. 500-450 BCE.

Museo di Villa Giulia, Rome: 3578.

Image: *BAPD*.

Yes, Neoptolemus is victorious, but the scene is also infused with fear, violence and (sacrilegious) slaughter; the possibility that Neoptolemus will batter the old

[43] Note Azoulay (2017: 176): 'In this long chain of doubles there is one link, the very first one, that constitutes a blind spot in the thinking devoted to the Tyrannicides. The statues in the Agora were, above all, doubles of the corpses of Harmodios and Aristogeiton.' The complexities of Tyrannicides images and 'the ethical basis for and significance of violent resistance': Tanner (2018). The divine connotations of Harmodios' pose in the visual tradition (which might add further complexity to the motif): Carpenter (1997).

[44] *BAPD* 202641; Beazley (1925: 117.1); *ARV*[2] 290.9, 1642; *Add*[2] 210. See note 63 on page 96.

king to death on an altar with the body of his grandson is so gruesome, so horrible, it borders on farce.[45] Similarly, upon the west frieze of the temple of Athena Nike—another sacred monument—connotations of, as Paul Cartledge puts it, a 'transgressive deed of bloody homicide' complicate any sort of victory rhetoric that we might want to find in this image.[46] For my purposes here (which are less to do with the political or erotic connotations of this motif), deaths past and future are embedded in the composition of this scene, imported by sculpted bodies that are not dying or dead but have been positioned in a visual tradition with death at its centre.

Indeed, the explicitly artistic rendition of the killing blow in scene 7 turns attention upon the cultural framework that underpins encounters with death on this frieze: recognising the climactic moment of impending death relies not only upon perception and interpretation of the movements, poses and imputed affective state of other bodies, but upon immersion in, recollection of, and discourse through a specifically sculptural language. In fact, the citation of a famously loaded artistic motif here might also direct scrutiny back onto the scene discussed above (scene 3). In that scene, too, aesthetic and ethical challenges together sharpen the polemic: the mesmerising invitation to see marble as alternatively sculpted body and sculpted rock presents viewers with a challenge that might, in turn, cause them to notice the fact that encounters with death are mediated by an aesthetic object. As Richard Neer argues in his chapter on stone sculpture and sacrifice:

> In the case of Procne and Itys, for instance, the centrality or marginality of animal sacrifice does not seem to be quite the issue; the moral dilemmas swirl not around the violence we do to animals, but around

[45] *pace* Borg (2006: 249) on Priam's death at the altar (discussing another *kylix* by the Brygos Painter) as a ',milderen' Sakrilege' in war. See pages 94-99.
[46] Cartledge (2017: xvi).

> the violence we do to people when we regard them as no different from animals (or pieces of meat, or lumps of marble).[47]

When it comes to the temple of Athena Nike, missing death on the west frieze becomes, in itself, ethically problematic.[48] This is all the more poignant because this is, we are told, a frieze that celebrates the Athenians for their ethical victory in respect for the dead (for treating the dead not as meat, not as aesthetically valuable, but as people). Carved in rock, picked out in paint, the sculpted corpse puts death in the picture. Slipping behind the represented rock, dissolving into its own stone-medium, positioned (in classical Athens) high up on the temple's least accessible side, it puts pressure on what viewers are supposed to do with it.

Visibility remains important. But perhaps, in this case, not so much the visibility of corpses as overall visibility, and what this does for visual impact. The 'viewing and obscuring' of temple friezes is a notorious point of debate,[49] and the west frieze is in an especially remote position, perched on a cliff edge. The balustrade touched the west side of the temple,[50] leaving little space for viewers to stand on the west side in a position from which the frieze might be visible. It must have been seen mostly from far below, glimpsed from the base of the bastion or else the ascending approach through the Propylaea gateway. Reconstructions such as the one in FIGURE 4.1 indicate that the view was not bad—the frieze was visible (probably even more so in colour)—but visual impact may have been more impressionistic,

[47] Neer (2012: 118). The statement in Elsner (1996: 529) (in the context of religiousness and ritual) is applicable here, 'The represented is not just in the image, the represented *is* the image'.
[48] Comparable here is emphasis in Greek tragedy on the visuality of bodies that are about to die: see note 87 on pages 185-86. Consider, too, images on pots of Achilles and Penthesilea, where the moment of violence, death and division is simultaneously one of beauty, desire and longing: for example, *BAPD* 211565 and 310389. See further Spivey (2018: 220, fig. 72) on the questionable ethics of seeing a murder victim as a 'masterpiece' (*The Death of Marat*, by Jacques-Louis David).
[49] See especially Osborne (1987); Hölscher (2009); Marconi (2009).
[50] See Simon (1997: 129-33) on the cuttings in the back of the west balustrade blocks for the temple steps.

with compositional elements (the multiple associations of a familiar Harmodios blow, for example) carrying greater resonance than the absence or presence of a cloak type.[51] That viewers do encounter death on this frieze (my preliminary point) is unproblematic. More problematic is the nature of those encounters. This sculpted dead body is partially perceptible, materially and ontologically complex, aesthetically and ethically complicated: like the body that is braced for (and also the one that gives) the Harmodios blow, it generates encounters that are imaginatively contingent and epistemologically challenging. Noticing death on the west frieze is about more than seeing dead bodies.

AN ATHENIAN ART OF DEATH

I now turn to the dialogues between sculptural representations on the west frieze and the cultural frameworks within which they sit, the religious-mythological-artistic vernacular of ancient Athens. How does this discourse mediate existential reflection? To what extent does it turn attention upon its imaginative foundations? I focus upon scene 6, which features a six-figure group with a wounded or dead body at its centre (TABLE 1, FIGURES 4.3C, 4.3G AND 4.3H), and the mythological foil presented by Sarpedon.

[51] The significance of the *exomis* for identification of mythological or historical subjects on friezes (and, especially, its indication on the north and west friezes that these are *palaia erga*): Harrison (1997: 117, n. 40). The probability of subject identifications: Pemberton (1972: 304), 'the west frieze is virtually complete and a subject should be found […] One can only conclude that the average Athenian was sufficiently well informed about the battle and its history to identify it easily'. In fact, our evidence from one, admittedly later, ancient viewer, Pausanias, suggests that the decoration may not have been the most obvious thing for comment in response to this temple. Pausanias' only observation (*Description of Greece* 1.22.4.8-10): 'From there the sea is visible, and there, so they say, Aegeus, threw himself to his death.' Then follows a brief account of Aegeus' suicide on thinking Theseus was dead. The significance of the view *from* the Acropolis (framing of Salamis by the Propylaia): Martin-Mcauliffe and Papadopoulos (2012).

On the left, a nude male figure lunges to the right in three-quarters view, the arc of the shield on his left arm forming a downward swooping curve that meets the arch of a second nude figure, who bends double to grasp the body of a fallen nude figure about the chest and shoulders. This body is lifted into a semi-reclined position, and the hollow crescent formed by his torso and thighs continues the undulating flow of lines that cascade from the first figure's shield, over the second's bent back, and through the body spread upon the ground.[52] In mirrored counterpart, a fourth nude figure to the right forms a convex protective arch above the fallen body, bending low, twisting from a rear view to hold his shield to the left above the body and reaching with his right arm to grasp it by the ankle. Above, roughly in the centre of the group, a fifth warrior (this time clothed) leaps to meet him, his cloak streaming behind in waves. To the right, the sixth, again clothed, is shown from the rear, facing away (like the one that bends low), and either protecting the fallen figure by opposing the leaping warrior or else joining his attack. Conceivably, the distinction between clothing and nudity might signify sides of the battle (this might have been further indicated by painted cloaks, shield motifs and helmet types, little of which survives). That said, the predominance of nude figures and shield interiors suggests, rather, that looking for 'who is who' misses much of this frieze's impact, especially with respect to death.

One of the most striking compositional features of this group is the familiarity of the central image, which recalls the popular Sarpedon motif, now best known from the red-figure calyx-krater in the Muzeo Nazionale Cerite, potted, painted and signed by Euphronios and dated to the second half of the sixth century (FIGURE

[52] The unusual nature of the flowing curves in this scene: Blümel (1923: 29).

4.6).[53] The outstretched nude figure, loose and heavy in the arms of a hunched figure (or two) is, in both representations, displayed at the heart of the composition with one arm reaching or dangling to the ground. On the krater, the retrieval of the body is framed by two spectators in profile, standing sentry; on the frieze, by two poised warriors in mirror reflection, one displaying his nude torso in a frontal position, the other clothed and seen from the back.

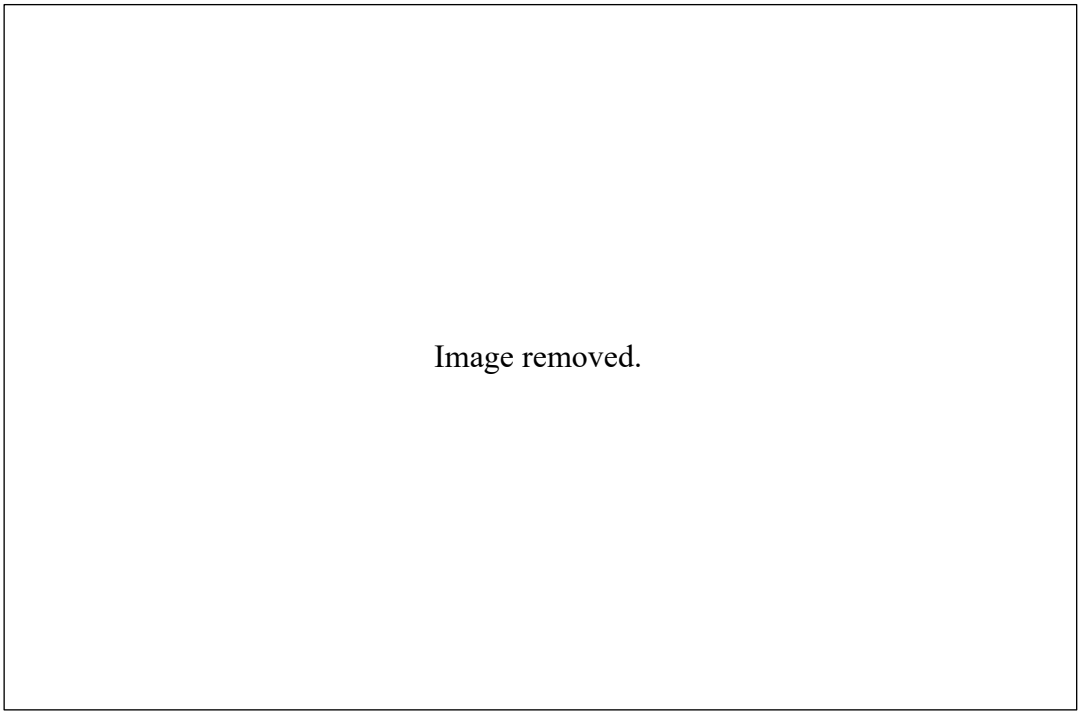


FIGURE 4.6

Red-figure calyx krater, painted by Euphronios. 550-500 BCE.

Museo Nazionale Cerite, Cerveteri.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons / Jaime Ardiles-Arce.

[53] *BAPD* 187. Compare a similar set-up, though framed by two goddesses in motion, on a red-figure cup in the British Museum, dated 525-475 BCE: *BAPD* 201052. On this vase and, in particular, the dead-body motif ('the afterlife of an image'), see Spivey (2018: esp. 157-59, and chs. 7 and 8).

Even more similar is the pose of Sarpedon's corpse on a mug held in the Merseyside Museum in Liverpool and dating to the second half of the fifth century:[54] as on the frieze, the corpse's torso is raised to form a gentle s-shaped wave from the scoop of his torso through the bend of his knees (FIGURE 4.7).

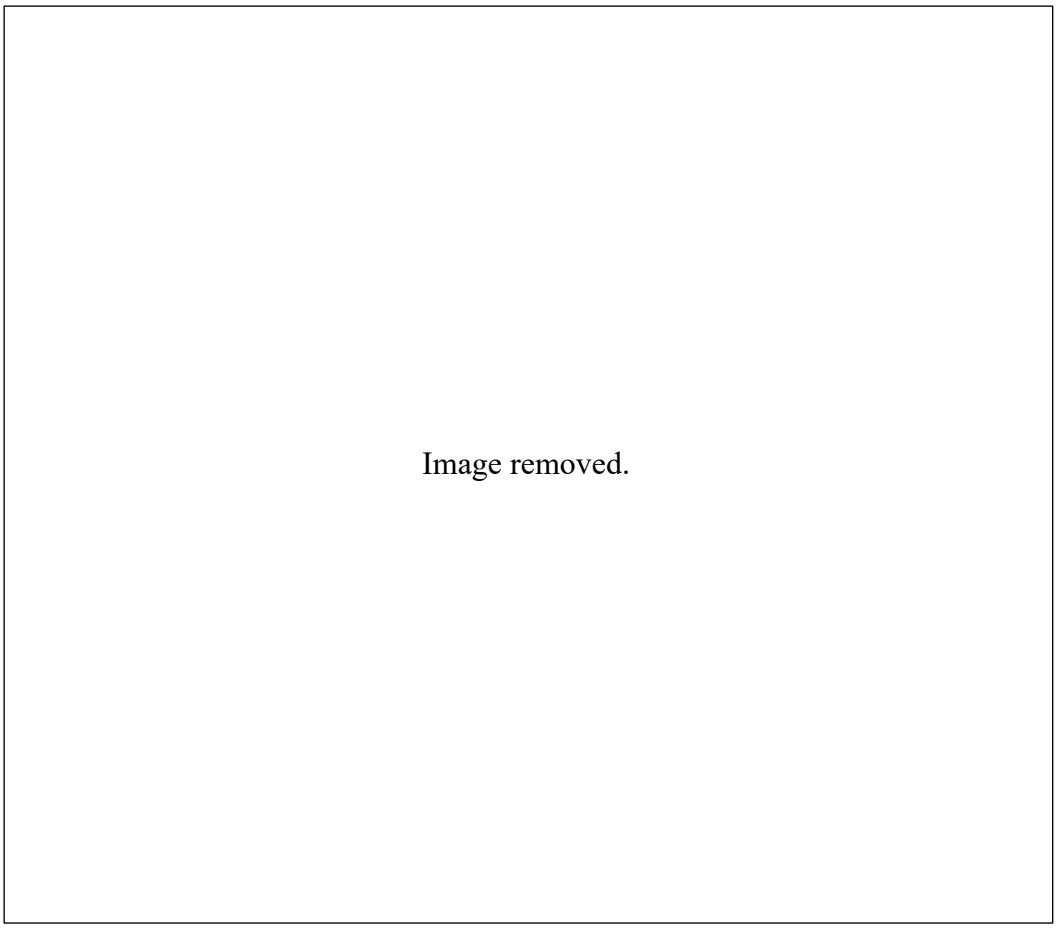


FIGURE 4.7

Red-figure mug fragments. 450-400 BCE.

Liverpool, Merseyside Museum: 50.42.12.

Image: *BAPD*.

[54] *BAPD* 17489.

My point is not that the figure on the west frieze *is* Sarpedon: the transfer of a corpse from the field or to the grave is a popular image in the sixth and fifth centuries, with the Sarpedon tradition bleeding into representations of Memnon,[55] and later unnamed men and women on white-ground *lekythoi*.[56] Rather, the representation on this frieze is in dialogue with images of Sarpedon, and Memnon, and perhaps also the corpses of warriors and civilians on pots from the funerary sphere. Representation of the prelude or aftermath of death on this frieze is therefore not just a platform for Athenian 'ethical victory' in respectful treatment of the dead (provoked by the image regardless of whether the scene can be identified as a mythological one),[57] but is also an image of loss, defeat, powerlessness, grief, excellence, compensation, heroism and memory, and participates in a discourse on mortality and immortality, and on the role played by verbal and visual culture in negotiating those categories and the relationships between mortals and gods.[58]

Let us briefly consider some features of the Sarpedon motif in the wider Greek cultural tradition, before probing how they might shape the encounters with death that are generated by the west frieze. The divine frame in which the death of Sarpedon unfolds is an important one in the visual tradition; on Euphronios' krater (FIGURE 4.6), for example, the immortal figures of Hypnos and Thanatos retrieve the body and Hermes, escort of the dead and messenger of Zeus, stands at the centre, behind Sarpedon's corpse. The presence of these divinities around the body of the dead hero taps into problems at the core of the myth, problems both theological and thanatological. In the version told in *Iliad* 16.419-683, for example, the 'completion

[55] See note 30 on page 87.
[56] For example: *BAPD* 212420; 216353. See pages 116-18 (including note 123).
[57] See note 19.
[58] The fallen warrior and 'Meditations on Mortality': Arrington (2010: 96-101).

of death' (τέλος θανάτοιο, 16.502) that shrouds Sarpedon's sensory perception (ὀφθαλμοὺς ῥῖνάς θ', 503) not only distinguishes mortals from immortals (as usually emphasised in discussion of death, mortality and immortality), but also unites them in mutual impotence and sorrow. The problem of Sarpedon's mortality is also a problem for his immortal father Zeus, who is bound by the need for cosmic balance (16.440-49). Consider the troubling image with which Zeus' decision to allow Sarpedon's death is marked (16.458-61):

> Ὣς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε·
> αἱματοέσσας δὲ ψιάδας κατέχευεν ἔραζε
> παῖδα φίλον τιμῶν, τόν οἱ Πάτροκλος ἔμελλε
> φθίσειν ἐν Τροίῃ ἐριβώλακι τηλόθι πάτρης.
>
> So she spoke, and the father of men and gods did not disobey;
> but he poured down bloody drops upon the earth
> honouring his beloved son, whom, to his sorrow, Patroclus was about
> to waste in Troy with its rich soil, far from his fatherland.

Whether fact or metaphor, the shower of blood from Zeus is infused with horror, pathos and honour alike: the gory reality of the drops of Sarpedon's blood that will soak the dust (κόνιος … αἱματοέσσης, 486) from his thudding heart (ἀδινὸν κῆρ, 481), slain by Patroclus, Zeus and fate; the tears of regret and futility that represent Zeus' grief over the loss of his son in tearful war (μάχης … δακρυοέσσης, 436), with the fleeting suggestion of father-son separation in 'far from his fatherland' (τηλόθι πάτρης, 461); and, perhaps, the early hints of bloody offerings from kin that the hero Sarpedon will receive in Lycia, granted by Zeus (674-75).[59] Buried in the literary and visual mythological traditions of Sarpedon is the overweening power of death, and mortal and immortal impotence, grief, regret and honour.

[59] For this infusion, see especially Lateiner (2002).

On that note, it is striking that the west and east friezes present contrasting scenes of male strife and death on one end, and a congregation of figures, many of whom are female, on the other.[60] Traditional interpretations understand the east frieze as a divine assembly, possibly the birth of Athena.[61] Following these readings, the contrasts of motion, dress and mortality might support either a distinction between two realms (human strife versus divine freedom from care),[62] or else divine attendance at or supervision of mortal battle from afar (as in the *Iliad*), perhaps bringing or celebrating victory. But it is worth thinking about what it does to frame a temple with contrasting groups of static seated or standing heavily-draped female figures and leaping and falling nude male hoplites. The war scenes on three sides of the temple layer new meaning upon the domesticity of the predominantly female gendered space on the east frieze, with its congregation of motionless figures, imbuing it with the pride, fear, loss, memories and mourning that define the emotional state of those left at home, and other battle survivors (see FIGURES 4.8A-C). These associations are strengthened by the wider visual landscape in which Athenians were immersed: congregations of mourning figures in the Theatre of Dionysus; gatherings of mourners on funerary ware;[63] the frontality associated with both votive and funerary statue types in the archaic period;[64] and the 'seated woman' motif and frontal gaze in the new wave of private funerary relief sculpture that emerges in the last quarter of the fifth century.[65] Indeed, others have remarked on the thanatological significance of the 'figure seated upon a rock', an instance of

[60] Analysis of divine figure identities: Harrison (1997: 109-16).
[61] See note 18.
[62] Harrison (1997: 110), 'This gathering of powers is timeless'.
[63] See page 87 (including note 31).
[64] On the frontality of an archaic *kouros* and the existential reflection that it generates, see Osborne (1988: 6-9); Elsner (2006: esp. 73-86).
[65] For the 'seated woman' motif, see the grave stele of Hegeso: Athens, National Archaeological Museum 3624, dated 410-400 BCE. For frontality, see the 'cat stele': Athens, National Archaeological Museum 715, dated 430-420 BCE.

which can be seen on block *b* and which occurs in other contemporary Athenian art in scenes associated with the underworld (FIGURE 4.8B).[66] Amidst this wealth of visual connections, the figures in the eastern tableau, comparatively motionless and comprised of mostly frontal bodily poses, invite viewers to pause, contemplate and reflect (mentally as well as bodily, mirroring the frontal poses of the figured women with their own).[67] On the Acropolis, a sacred space that was a site of Persian defeat and destruction, the congregation of divinities on one side of the temple of Athena Nike reflects upon slaughter with regret and remembrance (as well as, conceivably, triumph).[68] The image of the fallen hoplite is thus loaded with divine and mortal sorrow and the consolation of the lasting memorial and the honour it brings,[69] as well as more positive themes of Athenian military, political and ethical victory. To focus on victory alone misses the more complicated way in which death in sacred space brings two realms together.

[66] Olga Palagia has linked the compositional motif of the seated figure on a rock in Polygnotos' painting and the temple at Ilissos with the temple of Athena Nike, comparing the first two's themes of war's aftermath and descent into the underworld with the more 'triumphal mood' of the latter and interpreting each in the light of the early years of the Peloponnesian war: Palagia (2005). Note further the seated figure of Odysseus in the Nekyia scene on a fifth-century *pelike*: *BAPD* 213553. Ekroth (2010: 146) compares a seated figure on the east frieze to Theseus on Louvre Ma 743, though he does not draw chthonic conclusions.

[67] On the possibilities and constraints of a temple's different sculpted spaces and, especially, on the impact of frontality upon its viewers, see Osborne (2009).

[68] See note 23.

[69] In parallel with the *exempla* of the funeral speech, many of which, as Nathan Arrington argues, may be illustrated on this temple: see Arrington (2015: 175-76).

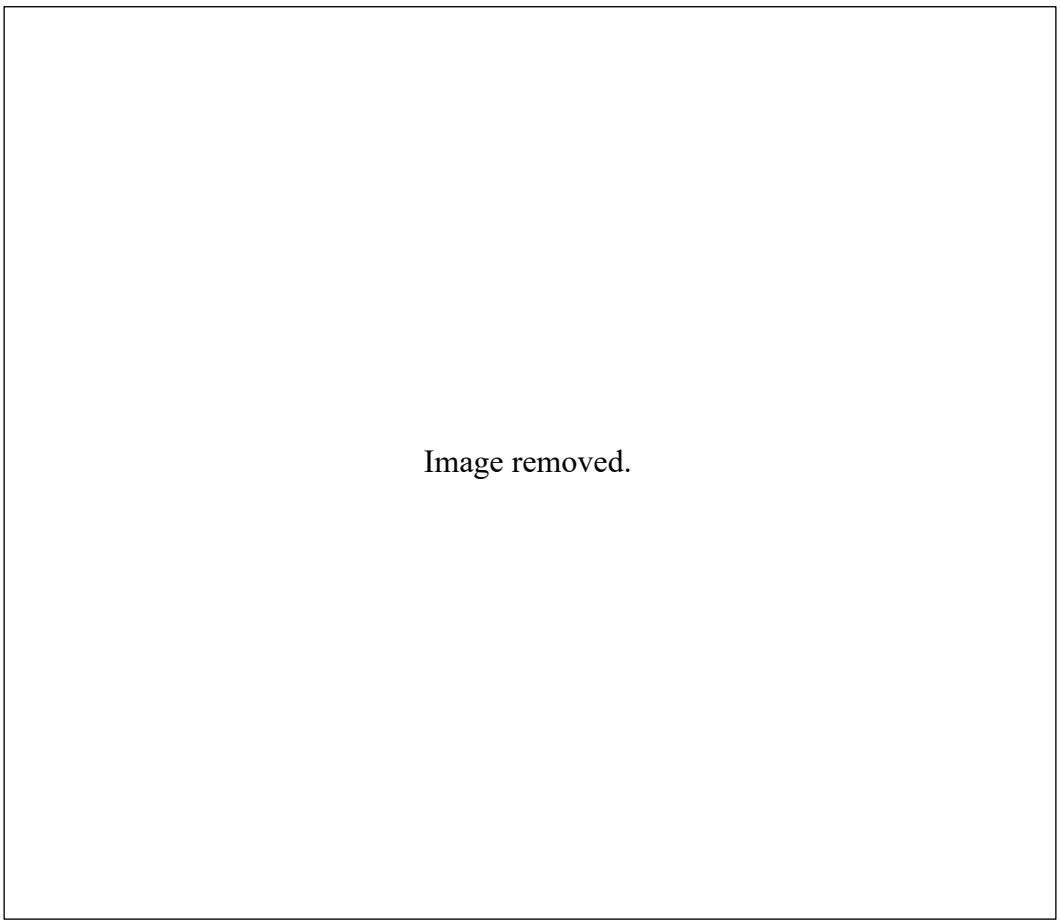


FIGURE 4.8A

Corner block *a* from the east frieze of the temple of Athena Nike. 426-421 BCE.

Length 48.3cm, Height 180.5cm.

Acropolis Museum, Athens: Acr. 18135 (east side).

Photo: Acropolis Museum.

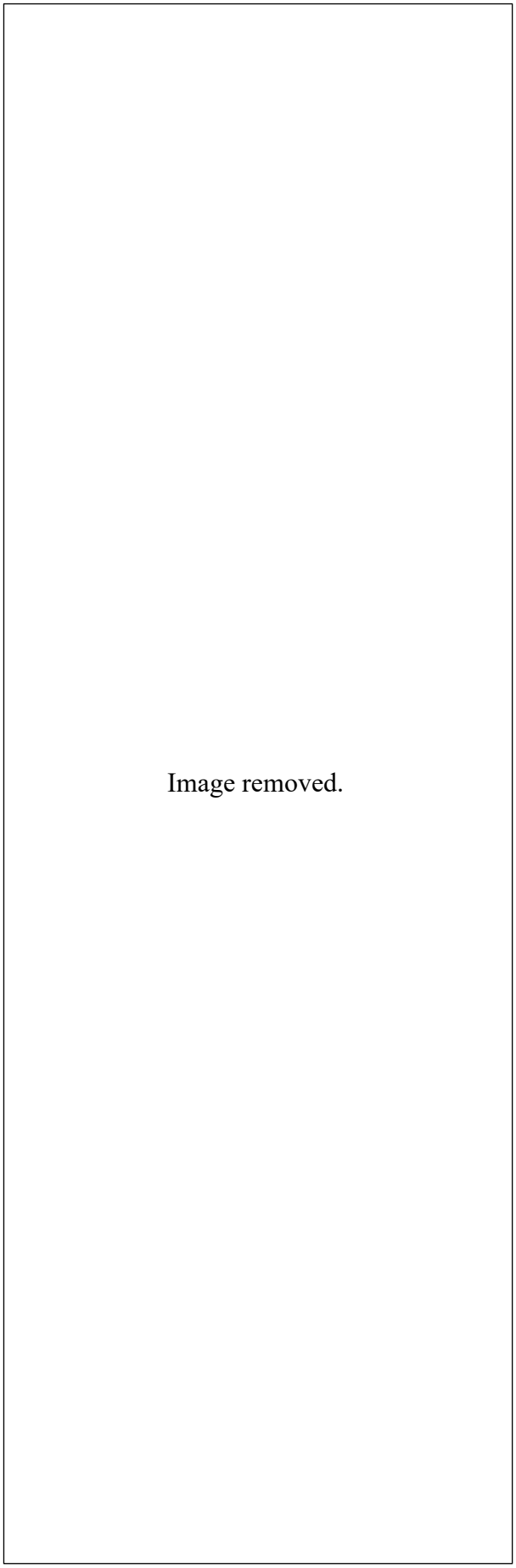


FIGURE 4.8B

Block *b* from the east frieze of the temple of Athena Nike. 426-421 BCE.

Length 207cm, Height 37.5cm.

Acropolis Museum, Athens: Acr. 18136 (east side).

Photo: Acropolis Museum.

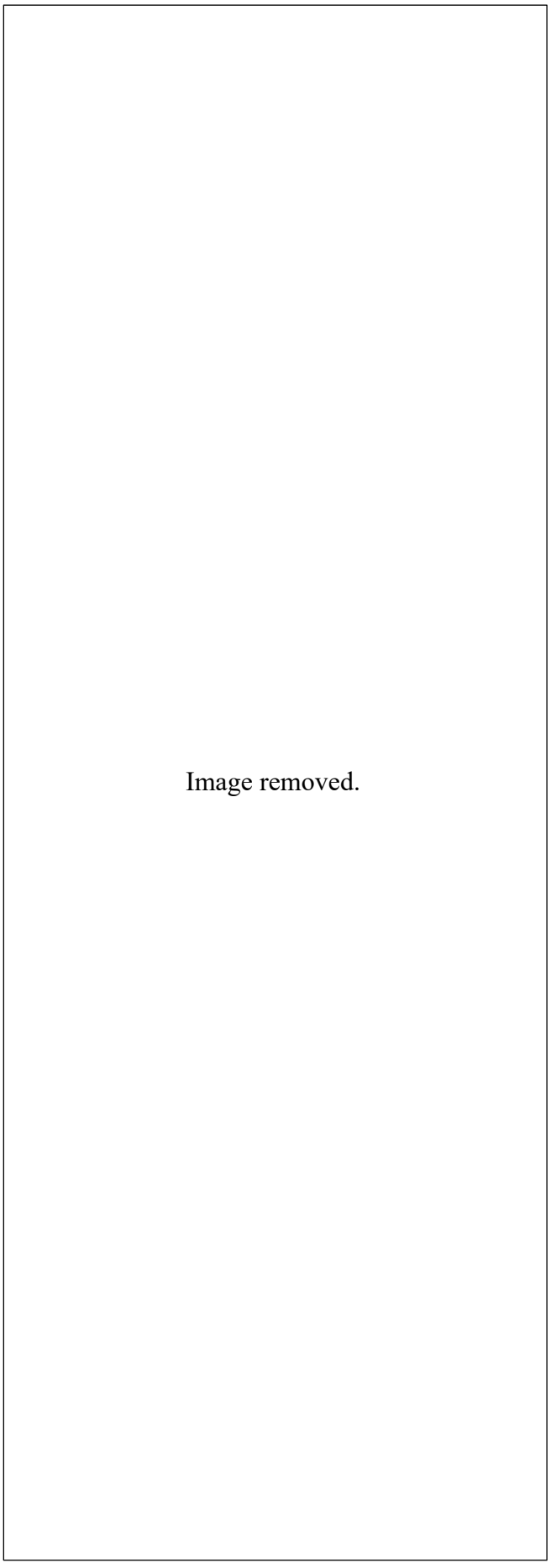


FIGURE 4.8C

Block *c* from the east frieze of the temple of Athena Nike.

426-421 BCE.

Length 180.7cm, Height 36cm.

Acropolis Museum, Athens:

Acr. 18138 (east side).

Photo: Acropolis Museum.

Indeed, the bloody libation with which Zeus marks the death of Sarpedon in the *Iliad* points towards another occasion of death that is raised by representations of a slain warrior on a temple, particularly when a frieze is viewed as one part of a sacred whole comprised of the temple, its sanctuary space (including two altars) and the framing balustrade: sacrifice.[70] For all the socio-political cohesion and hierarchical self-definitions of god-man-beast that might be triggered by the so-called 'cuisine of sacrifice',[71] blood sacrifice is also a thanatological event in which mortals and immortals share;[72] in Hesiod's aetiological narrative, the early origins of sacrificial ritual involved Prometheus' (deceitful) partition of the carcass between Zeus and mortals.[73] Reinforcing relationships between the two, sacrificial death joins as much as it divides.[74] Yes, the temple's sculptural representations of mortal and divine realms are full of contrasts: human strife and death (north, south and west friezes) are set in spatial and cosmological contrast to a divine assembly (east

[70] How much do you need to see to think of sacrifice on the Acropolis? Metonymic imagery and the ideology of sacrifice: Elsner (2012b) (on late Roman art); Neer (2012). The spectacle of sacrifice: Smith (2016). Compare Comella (2002: 31-32, fig. 19, 'Atene 7') on an archaic votive relief that represents (and constitutes) an artisan's bloodless sacrifice; Marconi (2009: 173) on parallels between the visibility/invisibility of the Parthenon frieze and the folded peplos on its east end (both are gifts for Athena). More generally, on the theologies of visual evidence such as sculpture, see Osborne (2016); Gaifman (2015), (2016). The point is not just that Athenian viewers might be prompted to think of a different sort of killing when they look upon a battle, but that the sculpted friezes actually put battle into the sacred space in which viewers stand. Though the temple structure frames its friezes and so separates them from the world of viewers, as explored in Osborne (2017), the figural sculpture does, to some extent, narrativize the space around it in the way discussed by Neer and Kurke (2019: 69-72) (though, as preserved, the continuous west frieze does not encroach upon the space of viewers so clearly as, say, the Dying Warrior on the east pediment of the temple of Aphaia at Aegina, discussed by Richard Neer and Leslie Kurke on p. 70, fig. 2.23). I focus on bloodshed, killing and death because that is the focus of this thesis; I do not claim that bloodshed was central to ancient sacrifice *per se* (as food or killing or expiation, or otherwise). For work that seeks to deemphasise killing and eating as aspects of ancient Greek sacrifice, see Faraone and Naiden (2012); Naiden (2015).

[71] The 'cuisine of sacrifice': Detienne and Vernant (1989). See further Vernant (1989: 135-36) on sacrifice and meat consumption as positioning men between gods and beasts (focusing upon Hesiod's foundation myth).

[72] See Bremmer (2010: 139-41).

[73] *Theogony* 535-57.

[74] See Osborne (2016: 247-48) for emphasis on sharing and the assumed similarities between gods and men in sacrifice. See further Kroll (1979: 352) on the Parthenon frieze as a votive relief that expresses the bond forged between human and god; Bremmer (2010: 139-41) on sacrifice as ordering relationships not marking hierarchy; Gaifman (2018: 151) on imagery of libation and 'affirmation of ties and hierarchies among mortals and immortals'.

frieze), and the opposition is enhanced by a difference in mood.[75] The gods are at rest—they stand at ease, lean or sit, and hold or turn their bodies into frontal views; the mortals fight, leap, lunge, squat and die—they twist, arch, crumple and curl. Likewise, the balustrade, with its images of winged Nikai in ritual procession to Athena on each of its three sides, has been celebrated for its 'radiant grace and beauty […], substituting sacrificial animals and trophies of armor for the foes of the narratives above…'[76] Nevertheless, despite its contrasts, the programmatic unity of the sculptural decoration on the temple and its surrounding balustrade has been well established.[77] But the threefold rhetorical contribution of historical, mythological and allegorical scenes to 'a single abstract statement—victory, victory, victory' also provokes more existential ruminations by juxtaposing two types of slaughter.[78]

Consider block north IV from the balustrade, which depicts two winged Nikai with a sacrificial victim, possibly for Athena, possibly for another god or a hero such as Theseus (FIGURE 4.9).[79]

[75] Stewart (1985: 65-66) also notes this contrast.
[76] Stewart (1985: 58).
[77] Stewart (1985).
[78] Citation from Stewart (1985: 67).
[79] The species and gender of cattle on the balustrade has provoked debate. Cows or other offerings to Athena: Kekulé (1869: 28, 33-34), (1881: esp. 4) (though Kekulé had only seen the sculpted animal that could be a bull or a cow). Bulls, indicating chthonic rites to a hero (e.g. Theseus): Simon (1985), (1997); bulls to the Athenian war dead as part of the 'Niketeria' (thanksgiving celebrations for victory): Hölscher (1997: esp. 147-56), followed in Hurwit (2004: 190). σφάγια for battle victory sought and won: Jameson (1994: 317-19).

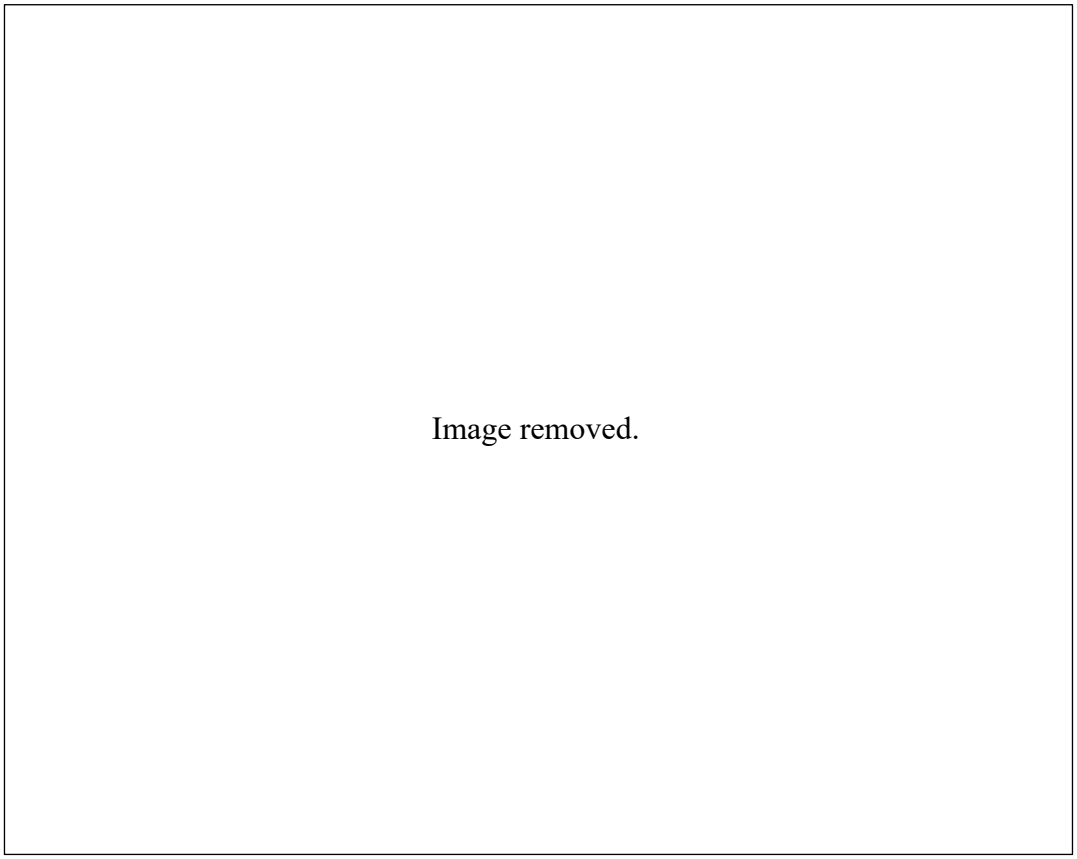


FIGURE 4.9

North slab IV from the parapet of the temple of Athena Nike. c. 410 BCE.

Length 123cm, Height 105cm, Width 37cm.

Acropolis Museum, Athens: Acr. 972.

Photo: Acropolis Museum.

On the one hand, the self-referentiality of the divine processional scenes on the balustrade reflects and invites mortal ritual behaviours, attitudes and motions in the sanctuary.[80] However, an additional and important link between the images on the

[80] Movements of the Nike figures as invitations to viewers to imitate: Simon (1997: 133). On 'divine reflexivity' as generating human response: Patton (2009: esp. 170-80).

Nike balustrade and those on the temple is death: death in sacred space.[81] Representations of sacrifice on the balustrade are in dialogue not just with the peaceful procession of the Parthenon's continuous frieze, but with the battles fought in its metopes, in the friezes and pediments of the Athena Nike temple, and perhaps (more problematically) with dramatic representations of explicit human sacrifice in the Theatre of Dionysus.[82] In fact, if the north frieze of the temple of Athena Nike did represent the expulsion of Eurystheus from Athens (or nearby Marathon),[83] it too, in a mythological vernacular infused with memories of Euripides' tragic version of the story around 430 BCE (*Children of Herakles*), might recall the sacrifice of Herakles' daughter (and ultimately, too, the death of Eurystheus), and the divine support these bought as a necessary precondition to victory; the story is not just about the successes of Athenian democratic might. In the cultural imagination, where gods and heroes might require the lives of young girls (Iphigenia to Artemis, Polyxena to Achilles, Erechtheus' daughter) and do often require animals, and where the community requires the lives of young men and the support of the gods, the balustrade sculpture, celebrated for its charm, beauty, jollity, and frivolity, taps into an altogether more serious tone on the Acropolis. The west frieze of the Athena Nike temple is not just about Athenian superiority (martial

[81] Other visual links between animal and human sacrificial victims on the Acropolis (real animals led to the Altar of Athena Polias in the Panathenaia; the sculpted figure of Procne and Itys): Barringer (2005: 169). See note 82.

[82] This is not to say that human sacrifice was, in fact, practised but that it was prevalent, as Hughes (1991: 185) puts it, '*as an idea*'. On the overlap in tragedy between sacrifice and murder (as an ethical commentary not on sacrifice, but on murder): Henrichs (2012). As Albert Henrichs observed, Burkert (1966) goes too far in his suggestion that tragic human sacrifice puts a question mark over animal sacrifice more generally (he is also hampered by his emphasis on the origins of the genre, rather than the contemporary dialogues in which it participates). Nevertheless, his linking of human with animal sacrifice, and emphasis on 'human existence face to face with death', is relevant and works across media as well as within them (in his case, tragedy). Human sacrifice was implicitly represented on the Acropolis: consider the statue of Procne and Itys, discussed in Barringer (2005) and Neer (2012) (this representation of the murder of a child itself comprised a 'bloodless' sacrifice, an *agalma*).

[83] As argued in Harrison (1997: 117-20) and supported, with further analysis, by Schultz (2009).

victory on the field; ethical victory in attention to the dead) but also about the deaths out of which mortal and divine outcomes are built. The fallen figures spread across the bottom of the west frieze appear visually and metaphorically as the ground upon which the living fight for victory and survival. Just as Zeus' own bloody libation that honours and grieves for Sarpedon also marks and initiates his death, so the wider sacrificial environment suffuses the fallen hoplite with loss and the weight of necessity, together with gratitude and celebration.[84]

As stated above, it is important that the fallen figure is not just Sarpedon. He could be Sarpedon, but he could also be Memnon, or another mythological, historical or contemporary fighter. Scholarship on the temple of Nike has put considerable effort into identifying the subject matter of this frieze, agreeing (implicitly, at least) on four points: the theme is Athenian 'victory'; all the figures are Greek; a specific battle can be identified; the identity of that battle matters. While interpretations disagree as to which battle is depicted (mythological or historical, distant or recent) the goal is to identify the subject (and so the meaning) of the representation and find in it a celebration of Athens.[85] But much of the power of an image such as that of this fallen warrior lies in its lack of specificity (or multiple possibilities).[86] It is not just that his death can stand for all war deaths, but that his translatability—and, especially, the ambiguity as to his national allegiance—signals the destructive

[84] Hero cult was also associated with the fifth-century fallen. For example, on revival of symbolic heroic/Iliadic features at the Marathon tumulus with its offering trench see Whitley (1994). On heroization of historical figures (noting that the Marathonomachai are not called 'heroes' in classical sources): Ekroth (2015: 386-87). See note 110.
[85] See notes 18 and 19.
[86] This is true of other images and scenes on the temple. On the south frieze, the impact of the battle operates on a scale of specificity from 'war scene' to 'battle with Persians' to 'the battle of Marathon/Plataea'. Several possibilities coexist, as evidenced by the fact that different scholars have identified differently suitable historical and mythological themes for friezes on the temple.

power of death, what Elaine Scarry calls the 'unmaking' of the human being, what it is to die:

> The "unmaking" of the human being, the emptying of the nation from his body, is equally characteristic of dying or being wounded, for the in part naturally "given" and in part "made" body is deconstructed.[87]

The bodiliness of death is not just about sensory experience, or sensory deprivation, and the evidential proof of the corpse, but is also about the bodiliness of being just a body, a self-less mass.[88] In the *Iliad*, the moment of Sarpedon's slaughter is compared to a tree axed for timber (16.482-84):

> ἤριπε δ' ὡς ὅτε τις δρῦς ἤριπεν ἢ ἀχερωΐς
> ἠὲ πίτυς βλωθρή, τήν τ' οὔρεσι τέκτονες ἄνδρες
> ἐξέταμον πελέκεσσι νεήκεσι νήϊον εἶναι.
> He fell, like when some man fells an oak or poplar
> or tall pine, which wood-working men on the mountains
> cut down with whetted axes to serve as ship's timber.

This simile works in numerous ways—the contrast of constructive work (and, indeed, the art of poetic language) with the destructive craft of war, the echoes of the fleet that brought Patroclus to Troy, the ordinariness of Sarpedon's climactic end—but at least one way is in how the poetry of these lines expresses the brutality of Sarpedon's 'unmaking' in the translation of his self into an inanimate object effected by the killing blow: the 'force' that turns person to 'thing'.[89] Indeed, he becomes in death not just an inanimate object, but matter for craft. As Richard Neer argues in his discussion of the Procne and Itys group by Alcamenes (see pages 225-26),[90] the nexus between blood sacrifice and *agalmata* problematises ritualised violence, including the dehumanising brutality of seeing figures as artistic

[87] Scarry (1985: 121-24, citation at 122).
[88] Though this may not be how the body is viewed by others. Note, for example, *Il.* 16.568, where Sarpedon is referred to as Zeus' dear son: Sarpedon still holds value as a person in the eyes of Zeus.
[89] In the (translated) language of Simone Weil: Weil (2005: 26). Though she is focused on what force does to men before they die, either transforming them to 'the level of inert matter' or 'blind force', what she notices in the similes also works for the end result of such force: death.
[90] See note 82.

representations. A similar permeability can be observed on the west frieze, and points not just to the violence inherent in sacrificial and martial killing, but to the cultural processes that not only represent but generate, and so constitute, ideas about death.[91] Here (in scene 6), a man unfolds like a garment; elsewhere (in scene 3, as discussed above), a body slips back and forth between rock, body and stone, the sculptural matter of the temple's fabric. Like Sarpedon, whose slaughter at the hands of another man's skill is fashioned with words and an axe into poetic art and boat-building materials, death-turned-*kosmos* on a temple frieze turns attention upon the ways in which ideas about death are built out of carved stone in sacred space.

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE BALANCE

In this final part, I turn to a scene that has been foundational to some interpretations of the representational content and significance of the west frieze: scene 4 (FIGURES 4.3B AND 4.3F). Like others, I will consider how this image might unlock some ways in which this frieze interacts with the temple and its viewers. However, my slant will differ in a fundamental way from many approaches to this image. I will not search for one specific story that might be illustrated by this image (or the wider frieze), but will instead explore how the sculpted work might prompt meditation on death. Indeed, it seems to me that the meaning and significance of this scene (and the frieze of which it forms a part) have previously been analysed in ways that touch upon important differences between the existential frameworks within which Athenian viewers might have engaged with this frieze in the ancient world and

[91] See especially Tatum (2003: 116-35) on the poetry in and of killing.

modern scholars have engaged with it and continue to engage with it today. It is possible that these differences, and the assumptions that have flowed from them, have hindered enquiry into how the west frieze, and the temple of which it forms a part, mediates existential reflection.

Let us begin with a detailed consideration of the image. The scene shows two figures fighting in front of a trophy.[92] The scene is thoroughly ambivalent. On the left, a nude male figure in frontal view is caught in motion, balanced with his weight on his right leg, and his left extended to the right, apparently stamping downwards: the line of his thigh meets the upturned face of the partially draped nude male figure on the ground beneath him, and traces of his foot are discernible on that man's abdomen. But this fallen figure is not yet defeated. The arrangement of his body sets him in mirror image to the triumphant figure above: bracing his left elbow and right foot upon the floor, possibly attempting to rise, he too presents one leg straight, one leg bent, and the concave sweep of his body echoes the gentle curve of the torso above that leans in towards its falling opponent. Each *chlamys*, too, billows in arches that follow the rounded shoulders and backs of the two figures, framing their bodies as a two-fold composition. These figures are locked in mortal combat.

[92] On the ancient Greek battle trophy: Woelcke (1911); Janssen (1957); Picard (1957: ch. 1); West (1965: xxxix-xlii), with catalogue; Pritchett (1974: 246-75), with bibliography; Lonis (1979: 129-46) (includes a criticism of the scholarship, especially the theories of Gilbert-Charles Picard); Beschi (2002); Stroszeck (2002); Duffy (2009: 131-35); Trundle (2013); Kinnee (2018: chs. 4 and 5); Nováková and Šályová (2019). It seems that trophies in the fifth century were usually temporary structures constructed on the battlefield from the armour of the defeated. There is some evidence for more permanent marble structures in the classical period, at Salamis, Marathon, and Plataea (on which see Vanderpool (1966); West (1969); Stroszeck (2002: 320-29); Shear (2016: 13-14)) and sculptural representations of trophies in sanctuaries (see Stroszeck (2002: 303)). See further Orlandos (1922), (1958a), (1958b), (1961a), (1961b) for the excavation and restoration of a fourth-century stone monument at Leuctra. The evidence for trophies has provoked much debate; see especially Kinnee (2018) for a recent interpretation of the sources. Note further the proximity of some permanent trophies to tombs, especially the Marathon trophy to the tombs of the fallen, at both of which *epheboi* presented yearly offerings: Stroszeck (2002: 317); Nováková and Šályová (2019: 197).

Faintly discernible in the space between them is what appears to be a tree with a shield mounted upon it: a battle trophy. In the classical period, a trophy (τρόπαιον) might be erected by the victors on the site of a battle's decisive turning point (τροπή), the watershed moment in a battle where the enemy turned and fled.[93] Here, however, figures across the frieze are still fighting; the struggle is ongoing. How, then, could a trophy already be present?[94] One argument is that the trophy on this frieze sets the visible scene of combat on the site of a former battle,[95] but this interpretation prioritises a narrative reading over a consideration of what it does to combine a picture of a trophy with a raging battle scene.

Surely the crucial point here is that it is not clear which way this struggle (and, indeed, the wider battle) will go.[96] The man balancing upon one leg just might be tipping backwards; the one on the ground could be getting back up. Somewhat ironically this latter possibility is supported by interpretations that claim that the figured trophy is what marks the overall scene on the west frieze as specific, as, for example, a representation of the mythological recovery by Athenians of the corpses of the seven that fought against Thebes from the site of that former battle (which is marked by the trophy): 'old ground,' as Euripides put it in his *Suppliant Women*.[97] The position of the fallen figure beneath the trophy has then been held to have a critical impact on the narrative flow of the frieze, with the man (identified as

[93] Trundle (2013: 126): 'All sources agree that the name *tropaion* derived from the turning point—the *trope*—of the battle […]. Thucydides (2.92.5; 7.54) refers twice to trophies at the turning point, the place at which the enemy had turned to flee.' See note 92.
[94] Janssen (1957: 81-82) pointed out that this composition mostly appears on Roman sarcophagi from the sixth century CE.
[95] For example: Harrison (1997: 120-21); Shear (2016: 353) (arguing that the frieze shows the aftermath of a battle); Pemberton (1972: 304).
[96] This point is also made by Hurwit (1999: 231-32).
[97] See note 95. Evelyn Harrison argues that the west frieze depicts the recovery of the bodies of the seven (drawing on Eur. *Supp.* 647-48). Stewart (1985: 56) agrees that the detail of the trophy indicates that a specific battle is meant, but reserves judgment on what it might be.

Theseus) in the process of rising, and so initiating renewed vigour among the Athenians on the right side of the frieze.[98] But, even accepting the possibility that this figure could be Theseus (which is plausible, but needs knowledge and considerable work from viewers to find it),[99] a focus on linear story seems to miss a meaningful lack of narrative. It is not obvious that this is a turning point for the better. Rather, the symbol of a turning point appears alongside a figure in crisis who might have lost, or might be getting back up: his life hangs in the balance at its own existential watershed. Combined with a precarious fight, the trophy does not symbolise victory obtained (a retrospective assessment), but the potential for a decisive turn in either direction. The trophy, with its circular shield, acts like an axle about which both men spin.[100]

[98] Harrison (1997: 120-21): 'Then comes the turn of the tide of battle, the *trope*, appropriately in front of the trophy of the former battle' (p. 120).
[99] See note 51.
[100] This fits with imagery of death as a turning point elsewhere in Athenian culture. Looking ahead, for example, to Sophocles' *OC*, discussed in the previous chapter, metaphorical images of death as the turning post in a race (*OC* 91), or the turn/fall of the scales (*OC* 1508), or even the 'down-turning' of his life that Oedipus requests from the Eumenides (*OC* 102-3), have a counterpart here in the visualised 'turning point' of the battle and the figure that tips over at a kick of a foot like a set of scales. Rachel Bespaloff's essay on the *Iliad* offers an interesting slant on this point, 'Who is good in the *Iliad*? Who is bad? Such distinctions do not exist; there are only men suffering, warriors fighting, some winning, some losing': Bespaloff (2005: 50). On preservation of the defeated in artistic representations, see Henderson (1994: 129): 'it only brings them closer than ever to your own warmest, most comradely, heart'. See note 108.

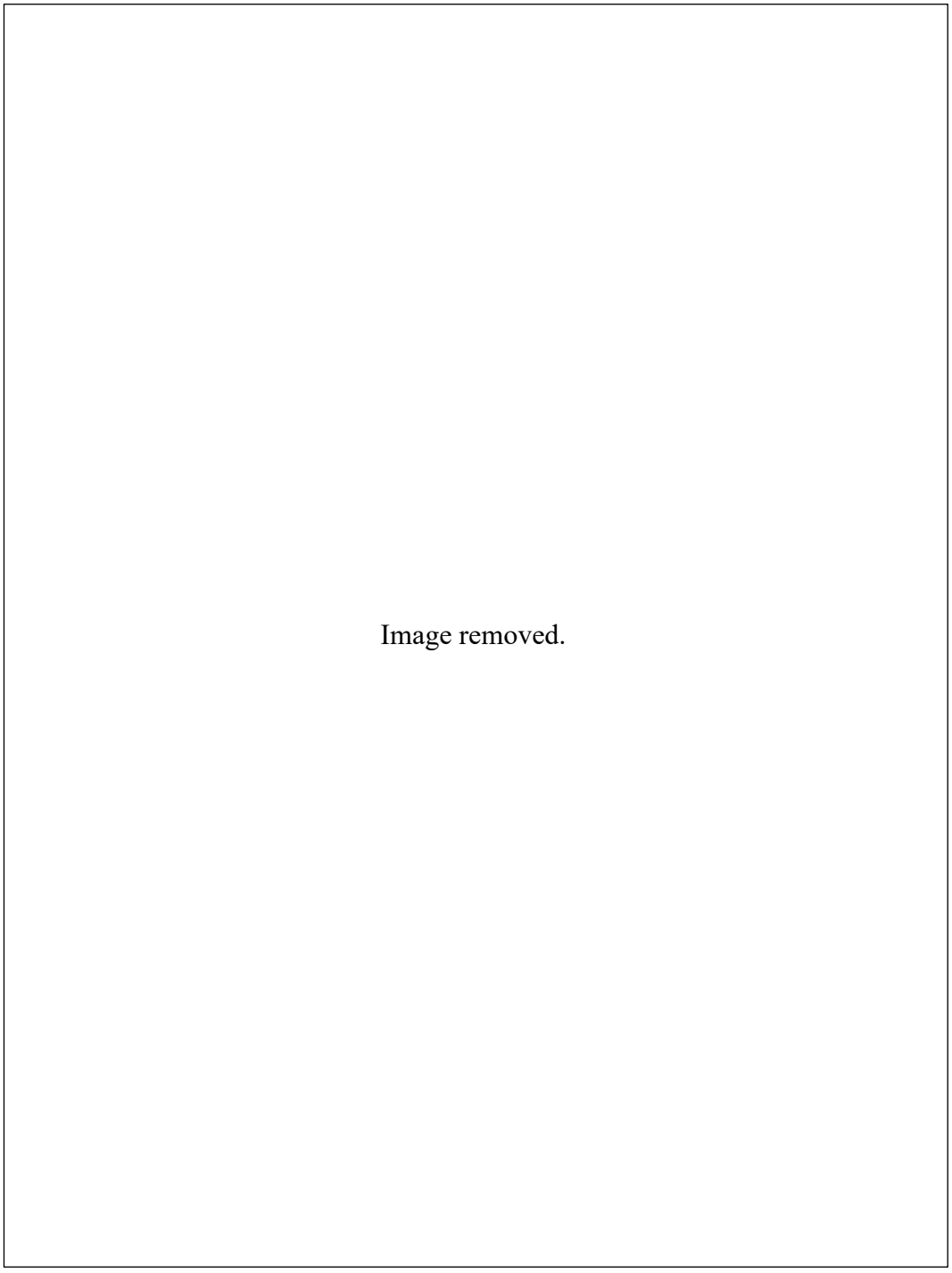


FIGURE 4.10

Fragmentary relief crowning a casualty list. 450-400 BCE.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: Michaelis no. 85.

Image: Ashmolean Museum.

Indeed, the precarious possibilities that inhere in this scene fit with the 'rhetoric of struggle' that Nathan Arrington has identified in public casualty lists.[101] One of the few surviving figural reliefs from the top of a casualty list, dated to the second half of the fifth century and held in the Ashmolean Museum (FIGURE 4.10),[102] shows the fragmentary remains of two figures, one of whom is a picture of vulnerability, seated nude upon the ground, while the other lunges towards him, apparently clothed.[103] This is a beautiful death of the sort discussed by Jean-Pierre Vernant in his seminal essay on Homer's *Iliad*:[104] the combination of victorious and fallen warriors operates a double-edged image of *aristeia*, excellence in battle and excellence in death as memorialised and compensated by the stone monument; *both* figures can be the mourned and celebrated deceased.[105] Crucially, the sculpted part of the Ashmolean monument does not re-articulate death as a victory or defeat (or part of a wider victory or defeat) after the event. The figures are depicted *in mediis rebus*, even at the very ῥοπὴ βίου (turning point of a life), at κελεύθων ἐν πολυσχίστων μιᾷ (a fork in the road: one of many branching paths).[106] The casualty list, which would have collated and memorialised many, even all, of the deaths of that year (regardless of whether the particular battle in which they had died was considered to be an Athenian victory or defeat), heads that inscribed cohort with an

[101] Arrington (2011: 202-3), (2015: 104-8).
[102] Clairmont (1983: 202-3); Goette (2009: 189-90); Arrington (2010: 73-80, esp. 77), (2011: 197-98), (2015: 101-3, 107, fig. 3.3).
[103] The impact is similar to that of the grave stele that marked the cenotaph of Dexileos, dated 394/3 BCE and held in the Kerameikos Museum in Athens: Kerameikos Museum P 1130. *pace* Arrington (2011: 194-202) emphasising the difference between private and public reliefs (the former showing 'complete conquest', the latter articulating struggle). He associates the 'complete conquest' on private reliefs with the moment of rout. On the Dexileos monument, see Osborne (2010).
[104] Vernant (1991a). See further Loraux (1982) on the shift from the 'beautiful dead' (heroes only) to the classical Athenian civic concept of 'beautiful death' that is mediated by the funeral oration: on this public casualty list we seem to be somewhere in the middle; the bodies of the named dead are concealed, but nameless bodies in the image are singled out and on display.
[105] As Arrington (2015: 107) emphasises, casualty lists are not simple victory statements, but are replete with '"struggle" or "undecided contest"'. Complexities of defeat and victory on casualty lists: Low (2010: esp. 346).
[106] See pages 166 and 181.

image of two alternative trajectories at a point where matters are not yet certain.[107] One point, perhaps, is that every man always has the potential in battle to be one or the other; every man is simultaneously both of these men; both these men (like all the inscribed fallen) are the same.[108]

Likewise, in this scene on the west frieze (scene 4), both winner and loser are presented in perennial *agon*.[109] The vignette of single combat between two warriors, their bodies set in mirror reflection about a trophy, visualises a moment of existential crisis, a 'turning point' in which lives are at stake. This is enhanced by intimations of agonistic activity elsewhere on the frieze. In fact, the image on the Ashmolean stele is remarkably like the image on the far left of the west frieze, block *i*, in which a warrior with a shield lunges above a nude figure slouched upon the ground (scene 2, FIGURES 4.3B AND 4.3E). In other scenes, men fight to retrieve the wounded or dead (scenes 3 and 6), are locked shield-to-shield (scene 8), or prepare to deliver a Harmodios blow (scene 7: an image of ambiguous triumph and vulnerability, as discussed on pages 223-24). Or consider the scene to the right of

[107] Goette (2009: 192) suggests that the state often produced *two* casualty lists, one for the fallen in general, and one for the cavalry. Osborne (2010: 248, n. 14) observes that sometimes a stele makes no discrimination between the battles in which the war dead fell, sometimes it separates the names by battle. However arranged, lists might include the names of both those that fell in what was overall a victory, and (presumably in greater numbers) those that fell in what was overall a defeat.

[108] This argument also holds for the monument of Dexileos: see note 103. Most scholars read one or the other of the figures as Dexileos; see, for example, the argument in Cohen (2000: 102) that the 'idealized victor' is the deceased, not the fallen warrior. But Dexileos can be seen in both the fallen soldier and the horseman. Comparable are approaches to Aeschylus' *Persians* that have focused on Athenian empathy with the Persians and reflection on the self through the other. I note especially Casey Dué's analysis, in which she demonstrates that, in their grief, the enemy are both distinguished from Athenians and resemble them, such that the play is neither a 'victory song' nor 'a universalization of the experience of defeat': Dué (2006: ch. 2). See, in contrast, Harrison (2019: 103-15) for the view that what the play is a patriotic glorification of Athens. On defining oneself not just against, but in the other, see Henderson (1994). See note 100.

[109] See notes 101 and 105 on Nathan Arrington and the 'rhetoric of struggle'. See further Clairmont (1983: 203) on the stylistic similarity between the Ashmolean relief and the friezes on the temple of Athena Nike; Goette (2009: 197) on links between iconography of the Demosion Sema and the Nike temple. The trophy as a statue of Zeus, arbiter of the *agon*: Lonis (1979: 136-39). It is significant that viewers are shown the interior of the shield: it is unclear to whom the shield belonged—or might belong.

the trophy group, in which a nude figure armed with a shield races over rocky terrain, his cloak billowing behind him (scene 5, FIGURES 4.3B, 4.3C, 4.3F AND 4.3G). The composition (a nude figure running in armour) is reminiscent of the *hoplitodromos* as depicted, for example, on a red-figure *kylix* held at Harvard University (FIGURE 4.11).

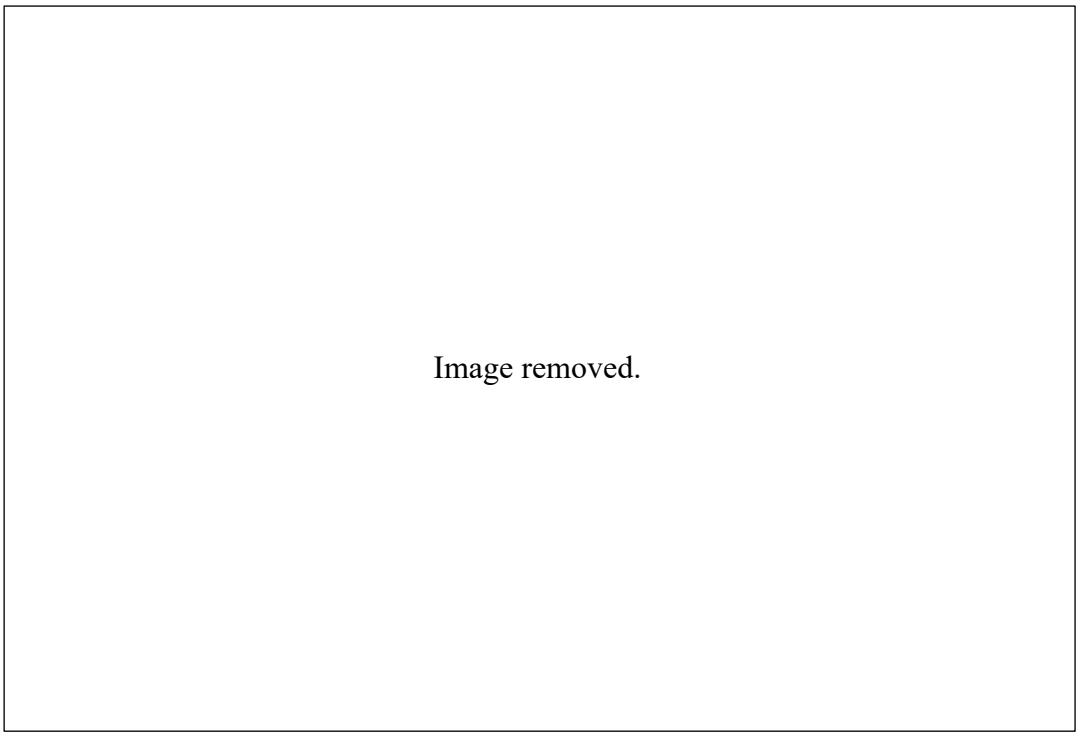


FIGURE 4.11

Red-figure *kylix*, attributed to Onesimos. 490-480 BCE.

Diameter 23.0cm (31.3cm with handles), Height 9.9cm (with handles 10.1cm).

Harvard Art Museums / Arthur M. Sacker Museum, Cambridge, MA: 1972.39.

Image: Harvard Art Museums.

Athletic contest is appropriate in the context of death (and, especially, memory of death). Ancient aetiological explanations for the games linked their foundation with

funeral honours, and games were one way in which the Athenian war dead were commemorated.[110] Nike herself was associated with athletic as well as military competition.[111] Beyond this, however, the competing figure caught in eternal motion furthers the impression of ongoing crisis in the frieze's various battle scenes.[112] Like other figures on the frieze, he is caught in a moment of extreme personal crisis, of isolated physical endeavour. He will win, or lose, as an individual. The trophy thus underpins not just the one-on-one struggle with which it is compositionally grouped, but the outcomes for which all figures on the frieze strive or die.

This impression is reinforced by the episodic format of the frieze. Taken together, the scenes do not cohere into a narrative in which one collective body of soldiers defeats another.[113] Instead, each vignette shows a climactic moment of individual struggle. The images present not a story, but a series of moments of *aristeia*.[114] Attention to struggle (rather than its aftermath) is often a feature of Greek sculptural practice in the fifth century.[115] But an interest in crisis permeates Greek culture

[110] See, for example, Hyde (1921: 9-14) on the funerary origins of the Panathenaic games. On games as a feature of ancient burial (for which little evidence survives), see Low (2010: 342, 348-49). Moreover, athletes, like fallen battle heroes, could win immortality. On hero cult of, amongst others, the war dead and athletes in classical Athens (including the possibility of heroization in life as well as death), see Currie (2005: esp. 89-119, 120-57). See further Meister (2020: 75-130) on the possibility of enjoying (momentary) immortality in the celebration of athletic victory. Note, too, the representation of Nike crowning a male figure, possibly an athlete on a fragmentary votive relief from the Acropolis (Acropolis Museum 1329), and the argument in Palagia (2009: 35-44, fig. 10) that there was interest in the 'quest for immortality' during the Peloponnesian War.
[111] Lonis (1979: 250-53).
[112] On the interchangeability between athletics and warfare, see Lonis (1979: 25-36); Arrington (2010: 7-8, 69).
[113] The episodic nature of this frieze has been noted elsewhere: see, for example, Felten (1984: 119).
[114] Moments that have then been granted a monumental *aristeia* of sorts on the temple; on *aristeia* in Greek warfare, see Pritchett (1974: 276-90).
[115] Consider sculptures such as Myron's *discobolos*, which survives in copies. Sculpture in the classical period is not only interested in struggle; consider the Delphic charioteer or the Farnese Herakles, which focus on the aftermath.

more extensively.[116] Pertinent here is Luuk Huitink's recent chapter on ancient historiographies of battle: his suggestion that the urge to narrativise battles, 'implying that […] [they] can be described in terms of a trajectory of causally and temporally linked events', is a modern phenomenon (by comparison with ancient Greek historiographies of battle, at least), suggests that the composition on the west frieze might be bound up in a distinctively Greek way of thinking about what a battle is and what it means to fight in one.[117] Indeed, there is something inherently 'episodic' (perhaps a better term here might be 'local') about the trophy. Yes, a trophy would be erected after a battle, but it was normally (in the classical period, at least) far from a retrospective assessment of a 'decisive battle';[118] it gave material form to a subjective experience of a local point of crisis. Though it often appears as an attribute of Nike,[119] a trophy seems to be less an articulation of 'overall victory' and more a marker of how things seemed to soldiers on the ground, as suggested

[116] See chapter three.

[117] Huitink observes, 'It is not too fanciful to suppose that at least some ancient historiographers and their audiences were less optimistic than their modern counterparts that battles, as objects of historical knowledge, could be understood in such terms' and notes, for example, that 'Diodorus […] attributes the central incident of Cunaxa […] to chance or fate': Huitink (Forthcoming). See further Hölscher (1973: 96) on parallels between the episodic formats of ancient historiographies of battle and the Nike friezes; Lendon (2017a) and (2017b) on the conventions of the 'battle piece' in ancient historiography, often 'no more than a series of episodes involving the fates and heroics of individuals' (p. 45) together with a rarely omitted (but seemingly unconnected) climactic 'weighing' moment when everything hung in the scales (pp. 47-49, 62-64). Though it is difficult to square Lendon's emphasis on individual exploits with Thucydides' battles (see page 285), his argument with respect to the presence (or not) of a logical chain of events in battle narratives (the point that is emphasised by Huitink) is persuasive more generally. Compare the suggestion in Harari (2007: 262-66) that battles are inherently extraordinary, simplified versions of history, 'Battles are decisive, among other things, because they are staged to be decisive by their participants'.

[118] Though, on the fifth-century artistic development of a permanent 'secondary' trophy that was more of a victory monument: West (1969). The stone representation on a temple of a trophy in a battlefield sits between these trophy types. See note 92.

[119] For example: *LIMC* s.v. 'Nike' nos. 159-67. On images of Nike nailing weapons to a trophy in Greek art (including on the balustrade surrounding the temple of Athena Nike), see Isler-Kerényi (1970), especially on the ambivalence of the Nike-tropaion combination (p. 62), 'So erstrebenswert der Sieg auch ist, der Gedanke der anderen, der tödlichen Alternative, soll nicht verdrängt werden'. See further Brouskari (1997: 93-102) on images of Nike adorning trophies on the balustrade; Schultz (2001: 26-40) for the suggestion that the central acroterion might have been a bronze trophy. Nike as a personification of victory, and the trophy as one of her attributes: Smith (2011: 20), with bibliography. See note 15.

by instances in which both sides erected a trophy in respect of the same battle (as in Thuc. 4.134).[120] This all has implications for existential reflection because the episodic format expands a singular turning point into multiple instances, making one man's crisis emblematic of a more general human situation.[121]

On this note, there is a lot more to be said about how a trophy might mediate existential reflection. Consider the formal properties of a trophy: what does it do as a physical, visible object (beyond symbolising a turning point)? The fabrication of the traditional battle trophy, a temporary monument erected on the battlefield by gathering enemy armour and displaying it upon a tree, implicitly uses an assembled body double, a trunk for a trunk, a pseudo-corpse that testifies to all enemy deaths (and the dead bodies that were stripped for armour).[122] It uses one mock corpse to signal the many that were routed, defeated, slaughtered. The principle that a trophy is meant to look like a body is clear to see in a representation of Nike decorating a trophy on a red-figure *pelike* in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (FIGURE 4.12).[123]

[120] On the chaotic sensory experience of battle, and the *tropaion* as a method by which individuals framed battle experience and narrativized it as 'victory': de Vivo (2014: esp. 173), 'the *tropaion* becomes the narrative'. Though where Juan Sebastian De Vivo emphasises the success with which a trophy transformed experience into victory, I emphasise the local and subjective impressions to which it testifies. Compare Lindenlauf (2003) on how Athenians used material culture to construct memory of the Persian Wars.
[121] Compare Sophocles' treatment of Oedipus' crisis in chapter three.
[122] *pace* Woelcke (1911: 142-43). On the trophy as a 'substitute for the opponent himself': Janssen (1957: 40-41, 243), who argues for the trophy's anthropomorphic origins. Stripping the dead for the trophy: Lonis (1979: 129). See Ducrey (1985: 274, fig. 182) for evidence that there were two types of trophy: some were anthropomorphic, some were not (she refers to an image of a pile of weapons on the third-century balustrade of the temple of Athena at Pergamon). See further Pritchett (1974: 250-51); note 92.
[123] *BAPD* 212473; Beazley (1925: 365.2); *ARV*^{2} 857.2; *Para*. 425; *Add*^{2} 298.

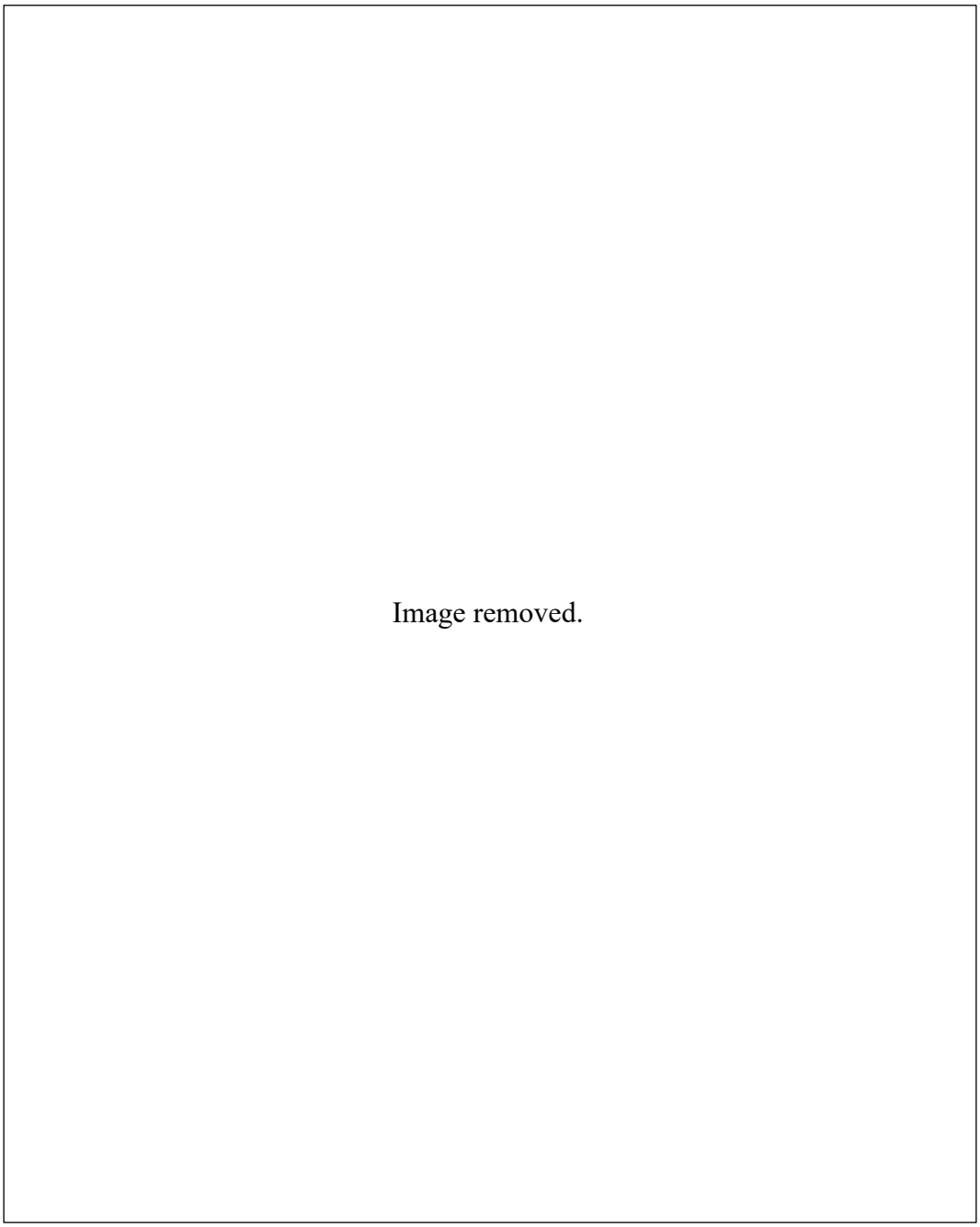


FIGURE 4.12

Red-figure pelike, attributed to the Trophy Painter. 450-440 BCE.

Height 35.45cm.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA: 20.187.

Image: Museum of Fine Arts.

The arrangement of the armour is anthropomorphic, an effect that is heightened by the eye that stares from the shield, as if the inanimate monument has sensory capabilities. The figure of an Athenian citizen on the other side of the pot sets up the trophy, or, more specifically, the making of the trophy, as a visual event: this painted trophy is marked as an object of (triple) visual attention, with the visible painted spectators (Nike and the Athenian citizen) turning attention upon the interaction between the real viewer-handler and the pot.

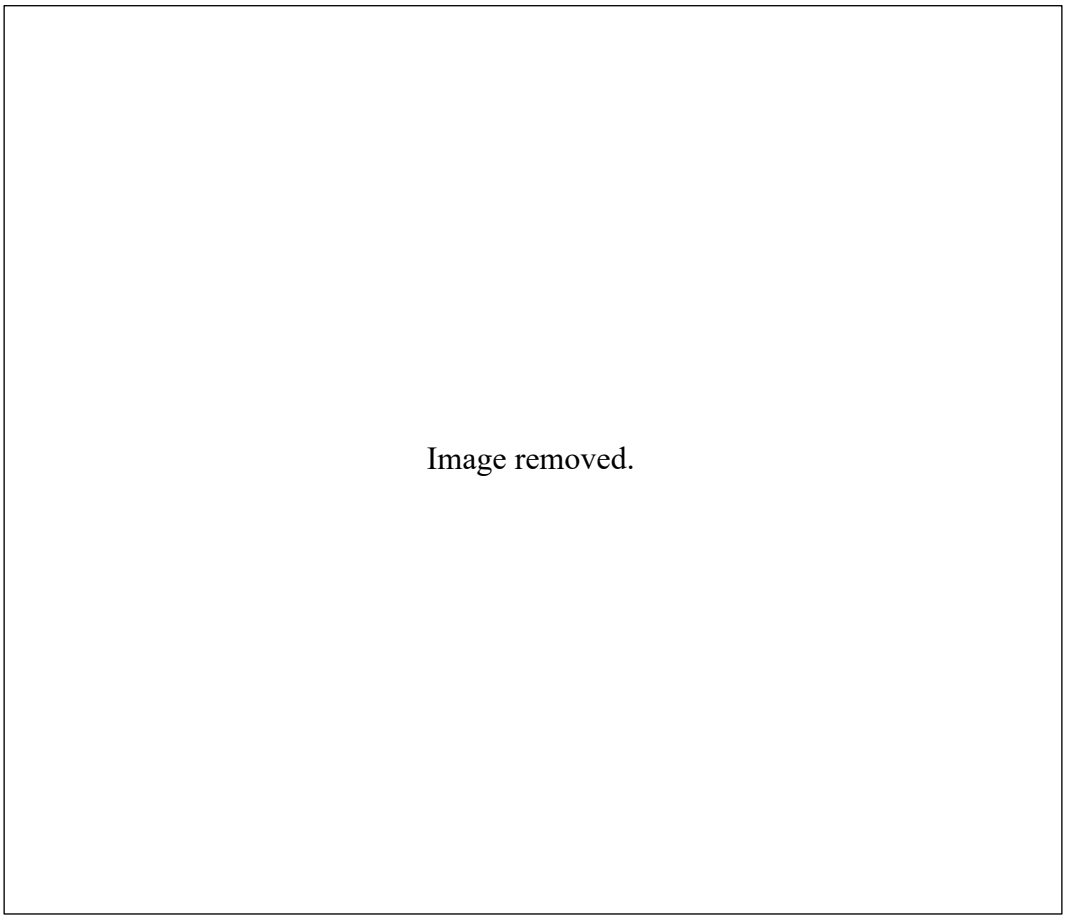


FIGURE 4.13

Red-Figure Bell-Krater, attributed to the Polydektes Painter. 475-425 BCE.

Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico: 325.

Image: *BAPD*.

Compare the impact of a painted trophy on a bell-krater in the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna (FIGURE 4.13).[124] Here, the black hole of the shield's interior draws attention to the insensate matter of the body on which it hangs, an empty vessel. This trophy, too, is viewed by an Athenian citizen (this time the latter's identity as spectator is indicated more explicitly, since he appears on the same side of the pot as the trophy). Moreover, the act of looking at a trophy that is a hollowed-out body is now paired with a scene on the other side of the pot in which Perseus raises the head of the Gorgon and is framed by the figures of Athena and Polydektes. The latter is seated upon a rock, perhaps an indication of his imminent death by petrification upon seeing the head of the Gorgon. Here, as often, the head of the Gorgon is turned outwards towards the viewer. As explored by Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux and Jean-Pierre Vernant, the frontal stare of the Gorgon on pots implicates the viewer in existential meditation.[125] What is interesting here is that the Gorgon's face is combined with a figure on a rock (Polydektes) and, on the other side, an Athenian citizen looking at a trophy that mimics a dead body with a hollow core. The web of associations connects scenes of viewing bodies (and body parts), viewing objects and viewing viewers, and draws a parallel between all viewers (Polydektes, the painted Athenian viewer, real Athenian viewers). The viewing of objects, especially bodies turned objects, mediates reflection on one's own mortality. Though images of trophies on pots are relatively rare,[126] these two examples do, even on a small scale, indicate that trophies in classical Athens could

[124] *BAPD* 214401; Beazley (1925: 408.2); *ARV*[2] 1069.2, 1681; *Para.* 447.
[125] See note 9 on page 80.
[126] A search of the *BAPD* returns nine pots that have been identified as featuring trophies.

be seen as complicated objects, objects that might prompt not just reflections on victory, but on death.[127]

On this note, let us return to the trophy on the west frieze (scene 4, FIGURES 4.3B AND 4.3F). Several of the fighting clusters on the frieze are comprised of three-figures, often involving two warriors fighting over or above a fallen third.[128] The bare torso of the tree that stands between two fighting figures thus operates like a missing third party (indeed, the tree's trunk and the chests of the soldiers are comparable in width).[129] The impression that this trophy is not just an object but a body that is built out of defeated bodies (from the armour stripped from the enemy), heightens the urgency that defines this scene of existential crisis. Which fighting body will become the other's trophy?[130] As emphasised above, the trophy's presence speaks to *all* scenes, all figures, on the frieze.

[127] Another notable example is a red-figure squat *lekythos* in the British Museum (1873,0820.298), dated 425-375 BCE: *BAPD* 9031757. This vessel, with its images of Nike constructing an anthropomorphic trophy, a seated warrior and a woman carrying armour, offers a link between the positive overtones of victory and the regretful undertones of death, loss and memory. The presence of a woman holding an object beside a monument reframes the more familiar set-up of figures (often women, sometimes with men or warriors) holding objects at graves (see chapter two). The association between victory and death would be even more powerful if this *lekythos* was a grave gift, as many were. Might this object visualise the conceptual continuum between monumentalising success and memorialising death? Note further the juxtaposition of memorials (for example, the architectural fragments incorporated into the walls of the citadel) and monuments (new temples and statues such as the Athena Promachos) on the Acropolis; note 92.

[128] This is not true of scene 1, which only contains two figures (though Praschniker (1924: 23) suggested that these met the left-hand figure of either block *i* or *k*; he also includes an image of a fragment that may have completed block *h*: Acropolis Museum inv. 2422). Scenes 5 and 8 do include three figures, though none are fallen. Scene 6 to some extent combines two sets of three, and does include a fallen body.

[129] Moreover, the very material out of which this trophy is built puts pressure on the ontological transformation that is effected by death: this third body is a stone-sculpted-representation of a wood-metal-assembled-symbol for a collective defeated body. See pages 219-20 on the corpse behind the rock in scene 3.

[130] See further Ducrey (1985: 237-55) on the lot of the defeated.

The trophy, then, represents a collective body and also reflects the collective bodies of all those on the frieze—and beyond.[131] In its own singular form, it thus exemplifies the epistemological framework that underpins object-mediated existential meditation. The trophy is a composite corpse, one body built from the armour of many, one body to stand for the many defeated bodies that fled in battle, one body to mark a collective. Set within an ongoing battle, it presents simultaneously the result of a battle, the aftermath of death and defeat (like the corpse that lies behind a rock in scene 3), and the motivation for one (like the bodies of the fallen that comrades fight to retrieve in scene 7). It speaks to and for everyone, past, present, and future. It is a universal sounding board, predicated upon the idea that one object, one body, could stand for many or, *vice versa*, that one man's existential crisis is replicable.

This turns attention, once more, upon the episodic clusters of which the whole frieze is made up. These snapshots of individual *aristeia* and particular deaths form a continuous series where any hints of directional imperative or narrative progression towards the right coexist with a sense of transferability and cyclicity.[132] The compositional whole is replete with repetitions and reversals of triangular shapes and bodies in mirror image. The nude figures in scene 3 (FIGURES 4.3B AND 4.3E**)**,

[131] In an immediate sense, there were also several images of Nikes decorating trophies on the balustrade: see note 119. But my point is also a wider one: the trophy speaks not just to figured bodies on the temple complex, but to real Athenian bodies that frequent the Acropolis.

[132] In this respect, the west frieze sits midway between the 'episode' of the metope and the 'continuity and sequence' of the Ionic frieze, thereby inviting mixed responses from viewers and not slotting easily into the three approaches summarised in Osborne (2017: 436)—or rather, as he emphasised there and elsewhere, giving viewers a choice (see, for example, Osborne (2000: 242) on how ionic friezes can simultaneously imply directional movement and static viewpoints). It is not so far from cyclicity to the themes of Nemesis that Simone Weil finds in the *Iliad* and Greek tragedy: Weil (2005: 11-20, esp. 16), 'The progress of the war in the *Iliad* is simply a continual game of seesaw.' *aristeia*: note 114 above. Compare, too, Marconi (2013: 430) on the temporality of images on sacred buildings (he focuses on ritual imagery, such as that on the Nike balustrade), which stand as mirrors of the present and commemoration 'for the rest of the time'.

for example, one in three-quarter view from the front, one from the back, hunch over towards one another with shields on their left arm: these opponents are each other's twin (an interesting prospect if this frieze invites us to think of the Theban saga and its doubles).[133]

Moreover, the multitude of stone shields with their (represented as) reflecting and refracting metal surfaces reiterates the procreation of images. Consider the warrior pair just described: does each one see himself on the surface in his opponent's grasp? Or consider the shield held above the outstretched, fallen Sarpedon-hoplite-figure: does the warrior leaning from above see his own reflection on the surface that covers a dead or dying body? Or the two fighters on the south corner of the frieze, whose sculpted bodies are represented in mirror image behind the double surfaces of their shields (scene 8, FIGURES 4.3D AND 4.3H). Might these introspective reflections—visualising one's own death in response to another's—intimate the sort of responses invited from viewers who gaze up at the bright temple sculptures? Friend or foe, these bodies that fight for life and death hold reflective surfaces in which those on the Acropolis might also see and lament their own past, present and future losses.[134] Like the rhythmic reiteration of lamentation and the

[133] In fact, nudity goes some way towards making many of these figures interchangeable. There is no obvious pattern as to who is nude and who is clothed. This has many effects, perhaps reminding 'of our animal nature and our mortality' (Bonfante (1989: 570) on the power of naked body), perhaps operating as 'an egalitarian submergence of individuals to the group' (Stewart (1985: 64)).

[134] Henderson (1994) is important here; the 'arguments' and 'modulations' about the self and the other that he finds in the 'dynamic, "*artefactory*", space of pottery' can also be found on a temple—as Robin Osborne demonstrates in his chapter on temple centauromachies in the same volume. Though Henderson accepts the '(structuralist) simplicity' in public art, it serves as an uninterrogated foil against which his observations about the pluralistic discourse in which a private object participates can be defined more sharply: perhaps he might have found similar existential debate if he had written on a temple frieze. Indeed, both take as their subject the quintessential, generalisable others of the amazon and centaur. But the same general questions arise, and become more, not less, urgent, when fighting men look the same, *pace* Osborne, who claims that, unless the context of a battle (such as the one on the west Nike frieze) can be divined from iconographical details, 'little generalisable impact can be made on any viewer' (p. 83). Surely absence of information as to which man is the 'other' is precisely what makes the scene so (problematically) powerful. See further Estrin

proliferation of black pot motifs on *lekythoi*, these continuous scenes of struggle express a material wail, but from a different viewpoint: the anticipatory moment of crisis and its perpetual rotations.[135] The trophy, then, exemplifies the existential crises across the frieze, and those existential crises thematise the exemplarity upon which existential meditation relies. A crafted body, it encourages viewers to make connections, and turns attention upon their imaginative nature. So it does not say (or does not only say) 'this is Theseus' or 'the Athenians are winners', but, 'whether you win or you lose, the deaths that you encounter here *might* or *might not* be your own'.[136]

CONCLUSION

The west frieze used to be part of a temple that belongs to Athena Nike. It is undeniable that victory was a central theme. Nevertheless, I have approached the frieze from a different angle, as a mediator of existential reflection. Thoughts of death and dying are, of course, not incompatible with thoughts of victory (in fact, the two ideas are sometimes two sides of the same coin). But it seems that a focus on victory has dominated critical responses to this temple to such an extent that it has left little room for a more existential approach.

(2018: 120-21) on the existential reflection that is prompted by interaction with another's funerary monument; part two of chapter two. On the ritual implications of shields in representations (for example as recipients of libations for departing warriors) and epigraphic texts (as covers for sacrificial victims): Ekroth (2010: 164-67). Shields seem to have been associated with death in the context of sacrifice as well as battle.

[135] Mourning, ineffable grief, *aiai* and *aei*: Loraux (2002: 35-38). See pages 105-6 and 132-33 and note 151 on page 132.

[136] On death as an individual defeat (even when the side for which they had fought was victorious), see Arrington (2010: 7). See further Lendon (2005: esp. 65-67) on the lack of distinction made by classical Greeks between Iliadic-heroic fighting and hoplite fighting.

Death is never far from the picture, either on the west frieze or on the wider temple. Always a larger concept than its visible traces, it is imagined through images, associations, symbols and metaphors. It is not only encountered in the fallen bodies that might be dying, and might be dead, but also in the scenes of struggle that cite motifs loaded with deathly associations, and in the porosity, across the frieze, between the body as person and the body as corpse, matter, object. Indeed, death is encountered not just in what the frieze shows, but in the dialogues between it and the cultural frameworks within which it is embedded. A Sarpedon motif frames an image of a fallen soldier in mythological, artistic, literary, theological terms, and generates encounters with death that are defined by loss as well as celebration, and constituted by the cultural monument that mediates between the two. A trophy exemplifies the outcomes for and against which all figures struggle; it sets the tone for the movement between specificity and generality that characterises the process of encountering death in others' examples.

My approach has been to treat images on the west frieze not as illustrations of specific subjects, but as compositions with multiple associations and significances, viewed as part of a broader Athenian cultural repertoire. Just as we must now view war art on the frieze through the prism of *dulce et decorum est* (a lens that is difficult, and perhaps inadvisable, to remove), it is hard to imagine that Athenian viewers would see a killing blow without echoes of the Tyrannicides, the retrieval of a fallen warrior without memories of Sarpedon, or a battle trophy without awareness of the defeated human trunks from which its spoils were stripped. All these associations and resonances interact with other possibilities, allowing the

sculptural representations to shift between the mythological and historical, general and specific.[137]

On this note, it is worth considering what specificity *adds* to my argument. Over the course of this chapter, I have often questioned the merits of looking for specificity on the frieze, on the basis that existential reflection is enriched by (and founded upon) more imaginative interaction with visual and verbal culture. But specificity is also an important part of the picture. Perhaps a viewer identified the frieze's subject matter as a historical battle between the Athenians and the Lakedaimonians, the Corinthians or the Persians, or a mythological battle in which Athenians, led by Theseus, seek to retrieve the bodies of the seven that fought against Thebes.[138] These possibilities might reinforce the urgency with which the frieze mediates existential reflection, because the bodies that fight and the bodies that die might be specifically Athenian bodies. This strengthens the invitation to draw analogies between existential crises on the frieze, and one's own situation.

This introduces a second, important way in which much of my argument has, in fact, relied upon specificities. How could a 'cultural framework' do any work if viewers did not notice, even subconsciously, compositional details such as a Harmodios blow, the body of Sarpedon, or the body-like appearance of a trophy. Of course, it is not necessary (or likely) that every viewer noted every possible resonance on the frieze. But, nevertheless, the criticism that, in the name of

[137] Mythology, the general and the specific, a 'mythic-analogic outlook': Castriota (1992: 3-16, 179-80). Though he interprets 'the monuments and their imagery as finely tuned vehicles of an official ideology' (p. 12).
[138] See note 18.

possibility, I have merely fractured a whole into specific building blocks, is a good one.

My point, then, is not that no viewers would have accounted for the frieze in terms of a specific story (or that every viewer would have seen a Harmodios blow). Rather, the power of the frieze as a mediator of existential reflection derives from its potential, when viewed in its cultural setting, to be abundantly specific. Coexistent possibilities together encourage and facilitate the sort of analogies that underpin example-based existential meditation. For the living, the examples of others (real or mythological, historical or recent) comprise the basis upon which any attempt to know something by observation must rely. Repetitions and correspondences, encouraged by the episodic format, then allow viewers to slip between identities and, in forging or unravelling connections, to extrapolate generic principles that might, or might not, resonate more personally. In this respect, the profusion of arguments in favour of one or another specific historical or mythological narrative on the frieze (and also arguments in favour of a general battle scene) marks its success. The fact that so many stories can be found in the frieze is part of what allows viewers to make those stories their own.

This gives the scene its continuing relevance. It does not *just* show the battle of X; it was not *just* viewed on the Acropolis in the late 420s. The turning points that iterate across its length expand upon an existential moment and make it neither summative nor teleological. The goddesses on the east frieze and the balustrade mourn deaths of the past, receive deaths in the present, preside over deaths in the future, just as the temple can be a celebration of a past victory and present Victory,

and also a gift to present Victory for victories future.[139] In these hyper-temporal and hyper-spatial respects, the imagery on the frieze does not so much '[illustrate] continuous Athenian success', as mediate continual Athenian crisis. Like Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, the frieze is not a conflict to be understood in one place and at one moment, but a possession for all time.[140]

[139] Trophies, like temples, might be dedicated to a god. On dedication of the trophy to a god (and its consequent sanctity): Pritchett (1974: 272-73, 275). Picard (1957: 24-36) and Cook (1904: 365) are also important here (Cook, for example, suggests that the trophy was an image of oak-Zeus in his capacity as war god, thus pointing at once to tree cult and to anthropomorphic representation of the god). Temples as trophies: Shear (2016: esp. 13-40). Note, further, that the figured trophy on the west frieze has a similar temporal complexity when considered in the light of evidence for more permanent fifth-century trophies, for example at Marathon. See note 92. On the west frieze of the temple of Athena Nike, it is ambiguous whether the represented trophy is meant to be a temporary organic marker or permanent monument and, in either case, it has been monumentalised by its representation in stone (see note 118); it, like the temple on which it used to be seen, cannot be limited to one point in time.

[140] Thuc. 1.22.4.

CHAPTER FIVE

OVERWHELMING ISOLATION: DEATH AND THE PLAGUE IN THUCYDIDES' *HISTORY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR*

> Dr Sam Parnia, director of critical care and resuscitation research at NYU Langone School of Medicine in New York City, said dying is "very comfortable".[1]
>
> *The Daily Express (online)*, 15th July 2020

According to Dr Sam Parnia, as reported in *The Daily Express*, dying is 'very comfortable'. Dr Parnia's authority to comment on what death is like comes not from personal experience, but from scientific observation and study: he is a doctor and academic researcher in medicine including consciousness, near death experiences, and recalled experiences of death.[2] Whatever conclusions we might draw generally as to the reliability of his claim, the trust that we might be inclined to place in his opinion here is modulated not just by his credentials and research record, but also the status of the source that cites him: *The Daily Express*—not, traditionally, an acceptable source of authority in a doctoral thesis. But it is the combination of these factors that makes my epigraph an effective way into a chapter on death and the plague in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. The conflation of scientific detail, the weight of authority, and witness statements from patients who have got as near to a death experience as it gets, combined with the frame in which information is reported, offers a window onto the themes of observation, experience, exemplarity, and medium (and the epistemological

[1] https://www.express.co.uk/news/science/880461/Life-after-death-what-happens-when-you-die-sam-parnia-afterlife. Accessed: 16:00 on the 15th July 2020.
[2] See, for example, Parnia (2014); Parnia *et al*. (2022).

challenges that these raise) that underpin my analysis of one writer's efforts to report the truth, specifically the truth about disease and death.

I focus in this chapter upon Thucydides' account of the first outbreak of the plague of Athens (*History* 2.47-54).[3] Thucydides' description begins with the plague's geographical spread, reputedly from Ethiopia. After explaining that he will describe its progress and symptoms, but not talk of its origins, he states that he himself experienced the disease and observed others with it. He describes its symptoms and effects on the afflicted. Emphasising that he will focus on its general nature, he moves on to the widespread fatalities and the helplessness and despair of the Athenians, recounting the horror as corpses piled up in Athens and anarchy broke out. He concludes with an oracle that may, or may not, have foretold the plague.

Though this passage has been extensively discussed, there has, perhaps surprisingly, been little attention to death and dying. Instead, work has circled around identification of the disease,[4] the influence of the Hippocratic corpus on Thucydides and his awareness (and incorporation) of technical medical

[3] An overview of the plague: Kohn (1995: 250); Hays (2005: 1-8).
[4] For example, Crawfurd (1914: 31-35); Page (1953: 110-19). For discussion and synthesis of some suggestions and approaches to identification: Gomme (1956: 150-53) on 2.48.3. Cautioning against attempts to identify the disease (chasing a 'will-o'-the-wisp'): Holladay and Poole (1979), (1982), (1984: esp. 485 for the citation); Holladay (1986).

terminology,[5] and where this passage fits within his wider history of the war,[6] in particular, its impact when set against the positive vision of a cohesive Athenian society that immediately precedes it in Pericles' funeral oration,[7] and its value as a foil to the social disintegration at Corcyra.[8]

Here, by contrast, I treat Thucydides' account of the plague as exemplary of a wider historiographical and existential discourse. His empirical approach to disease highlights the challenge of accessing a patient's experience of disease from observation and description, and a general account of disease from diverse particulars. His account thus models the conceptual problem that governs my thesis: how to understand what dying is and is like from the perspective of the living.[9] Also integral to this chapter, however, is the distinctive way in which Thucydides' historiography mediates reflection on this epistemological problem: bound up with the challenges of exteriority and generality that beset existential reflection is a methodological anxiety about the relationship between perception and knowledge,

[5] Cochrane (1929: 14-34); Page (1953: 97-110); Weidauer (1954); Momigliano (1987: 13-15); Jouanna (2005: 13-17) (though see note 9), as well as work by Holladay and Poole (see note 4). Note Thomas (2006: esp. 103) on Thucydides' independence, originality, and different objectives and interests: 'Thucydides was producing his own medical theory, and probably in rivalry to the doctors.' More recently, Robin Lane Fox has argued that *Epidemics* 1 and 3 were written in the 460s BCE by Hippocrates and so pre-dated Thucydides, who read or heard them: Lane Fox (2020: 273-82, esp. 282). Morgan (1994) acknowledges Thucydides' exposure to medical vocabulary, but emphasises his literary goals (and resulting 'medical inexactness'), while Demont (1983: 352) and Marshall (1990) emphasise his political ones (defence of Pericles). For literary approaches to Thucydides' language of plague (discussed in part three of this chapter), see note 77.

[6] Mittelstadt (1968), for example, argues that Thucydides offers his plague description as 'a kind of symbolic program for the whole work' (p. 154), for his *History* as a pathological study of ambition and its effects. See further Lloyd (2003: 122), in note 75.

[7] See, for example, Keys (1944: 35); Macleod (1983: 151-53); Winton (1992); Morgan (1994: 207-8); Taylor (2009: 68-69). The plague, funeral speech and Sicilian disaster: Joho (2016). Note further Allison (1983) on parallels between the plague description and Pericles' policy speech at 1.140-44.

[8] Orwin (1988), (1994: 173-84) (in which he connects plague, stasis and the funeral speech).

[9] Jouanna (2005: 20-25) is notable here for his discussion of the metaphorical power of medicine in historical writings, but he focuses on cause and crisis and, crucially, on whether Thucydides adopts medical terminology (concluding that direct transposition of the concepts is difficult to establish). On the powerful metaphoricity of disease in Athens (focusing upon the language of plague in Greek tragedy), see Mitchell-Boyask (2008: 18-44). See further note 34 on page 21.

the concrete and the abstract. As a historian, Thucydides faced a challenge: to understand and communicate 'what happened' in the plague and the war based on his observations, including those based on his enquiries and (limited) personal experience. This challenge maps onto the challenge of extrapolating from observation and (limited) personal experience to build a thesis as to what death is and is like. The historian, like the doctor and the living, is troubled (and blessed) by distance from the object of study.[10] Thinking about history, disease and death is a threefold, mutually illuminative discourse.

In these respects, my approach intersects with other approaches in scholarship on Thucydides, which have often emphasised his interest in the human condition, the general and the abstract.[11] But where I look at how Thucydides' account of the plague builds a picture of death and foregrounds the challenges inherent in that endeavour, others have focused more on Thucydides the historiographer, assessing, for better or worse, his objectivity and shaping power over his narrative.[12] Insofar

[10] Distance and history: Hedrick (1993: esp. 18). In fact, Thucydides' writing has, at different times and by different people, been praised both for objectivity and for vividity. Potentiality for vicarious experience (and *enargeia*) in Thucydides was emphasised in Plutarch *De glor. Ath.* ch. 3 (*Mor.* 347A). See further Connor (1985: 9-12); Walker (1993); Grethlein (2013: 92). Robinson (1985: 20-21) argues, by contrast, that this vividity (characteristic of the plague account) detracts from Thucydides' credibility as a historian.

[11] Greenwood (2006: ix): '… a prominent theme in the *History* is the patterns in the human condition that shape events'. See further Ponchon (2017) for emphasis on Thucydides as a philosopher and his 'tragic rationality'. Indeed, Thucydides' development of abstract language, and 'the process of abstraction that seems to lie behind [his] method of composition' supports a reading that looks for more theoretical meditation: see Allison (1997: esp. 1-2). See further Parry (1989: 117-94) on Thucydides' abstract language and the struggle between human intellect and the *paralogos*; de Romilly (1990: 61-104), (2005: 93-94) on generality in Thucydides; Goldhill (2002: 36), 'History, for Thucydides, is important for what it can show of the general and the abstract'; note 68.

[12] Thucydides the writer: Cornford (1907); Hunter (1973); Hornblower (1987), (1994); Gribble (1998); Rood (1998), (2004); Allison (1997); Dewald (2005), (2009); Greenwood (2006); de Romilly (2017). The inextricable connection of Thucydides' history and writing: Loraux (1986b: 139), 'la pure transitivité'; Macleod (1983: ch. 13); Dover (1988: 53-64); Goldhill (2002). The 'writtenness' of Thucydides' text: Gentili and Cerri (1988: 11-13); Yunis (2003: 198-204); Edmunds (2009). Morrison (2004), however, sees Thucydides as a transitional figure between oral and written culture. Note that Rubincam (1991), who makes the war dead her subject, focuses on Thucydides' research methods and the reliability of his casualty numbers.

as this scholarship is fundamental to any appreciation of Thucydides as a historian and his work as a history, it lays the foundations for my discussion of where existential meditation fits within the picture. There is, however, much more to be said about what thinking about plague, and thinking about a survivor's account of plague (as part of a history of war), does for thinking about death.

In the first part of this chapter, I consider how Thucydides foregrounds the problem of exteriority when thinking about disease. I do this by analysing his emphasis on observation and experience, and the possible mismatch between visibility and knowability. Important here is where a history of plague sits within pain discourse, the problem of interiority and the power of words to communicate subjective experience. This first section is not specifically about death (as opposed to disease), but it provides an important backdrop for later parts of the chapter. Indeed, the disease is so virulent, so frightening, and so extensively fatal that it renders life and death subjects of urgent and consuming importance not just in the minds of Athenians who suffered from and survived the plague, but in the minds of Thucydides' readers. I then turn to questions of generality: to what extent can (and should) particular incidences of disease and death be subsumed into a single account? Central to this part is a consideration of mass death, and the distinctive way in which it might shape existential reflection. Finally, I consider the poetics of Thucydides' account. What does it do to combine a literary register with an empirical one, and how far might this combination turn attention upon the nature of the subject matter and the epistemological challenges that it poses?

> γενόμενον γὰρ κρεῖσσον λόγου τὸ εἶδος τῆς νόσου τά τε ἄλλα χαλεπωτέρως ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν προσέπιπτεν ἑκάστῳ καὶ ἐν τῷδε ἐδήλωσε μάλιστα ἄλλο τι ὂν ἢ τῶν ξυντρόφων τι.
>
> For the form of the disease was beyond reckoning; for the most part it fell upon each person more grievously than human nature can bear, and then in each specific case it showed itself to be something different from any of the diseases with which we are familiar.
>
> *History* 2.50.1.

Let us, then, begin with how Thucydides foregrounds exteriority and the limitations of extrapolating from observation in his description of the plague. This is most overt in paragraph 49, in which Thucydides describes the symptoms of the plague and the impact it had on the bodies of its victims. By establishing a thematic opposition between the exterior and the interior, between what can be observed and what must be experienced, he sets a question mark over the extent to which a third party can come to know and understand another's predicament.[13] How relevant is visibility (or, more generally, perceptibility)? How reliable is observation?

In the initial section of 2.49, Thucydides emphasises symptoms of the plague that are identifiable to the senses of an external party. Some are visible, such as redness of eyes (ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρυθήματα, 2.49.2), bloody/blood-red throat and tongue (ἥ τε φάρυγξ καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα, εὐθὺς αἱματώδη ἦν, 2.49.2), vomited bile (ἀποκαθάρσεις χολῆς, 2.49.3) and spasms (σπασμόν […] ἰσχυρόν, 2.49.4); others assail with smell (πνεῦμα ἄτοπον καὶ δυσῶδες, 49.2) or sound (πταρμὸς καὶ βράγχος; βηχὸς ἰσχυροῦ;

[13] On the body and its hidden interior in Hippocratic thought (including by comparison with early Greek texts), see Holmes (2018: 67-79). See further Holmes (2010: esp. ch. 3) on disease, symptoms, and the unseen; King (2017: 11-17) on changes in the imperial period, with more detailed anatomical knowledge about the internal body.

λύγξ […] κενή, 2.49.3-4). Thucydides explicitly speaks of the appearance of the parts within (τὰ ἐντός, 2.49.2), and it is significant that so much of this is evidence from the body's interior that is observable from without: certainly the throat and tongue (which can be examined), but also, perhaps, the breast (τὰ στήθη, 2.49.3) and heart (τὴν καρδίαν, 2.49.3). The implication is that one person's internal situation *can* be recognised by another's perception, by contemplation (σκοπῶν, 2.48.3) and sight (ἰδών, 2.48.3).[14]

It is interesting that none of these details give information as to the patient's experience. Little attention is paid to pain, for example, beyond one reference to the exertion or suffering (πόνος, 2.49.3) that descends with violent coughing into the breast.[15] Instead, the object of Thucydides' description is the disease itself, and 'what sort of thing it became' (οἷον […] ἐγίγνετο, 2.48.3).[16] What he focuses on, in paragraph 49 at least, is its impact on the body. But attention to the perceptible corporeal features of another's predicament diverts attention from that person's experience of disease, deconstructing the person into body parts for study. Indeed, others have commented upon Thucydides' emphasis on the head to toe movement of the disease, which may suggest a methodical description of symptoms characteristic of novice doctors rather than bearing any sort of meaningful relationship to the disease's progress or patient experience.[17] If this is correct, the

[14] Indeed, following the argument in Holmes (2007), visual evidence (such as blood) might contribute to representation of unseen pain.
[15] Note a corresponding absence of detail on suffering in the Iliadic plague, discussed in Holmes (2007: esp. 53). In Hippocratic texts such as *Epidemic I* and *III*, there are several references to the fact of pain, but little insight into what that pain was like.
[16] There is a conceptual similarity between objectification of pain for the purposes of demonstrating power, as discussed in Scarry (1985: 27-59), and objectification that turns a suffering body into symptoms, the 'disease itself', for the purposes of medical analysis.
[17] This seems consistent with the descriptive mode of 'Thucydides the Painter' in Allan (2013). See further Bakker (1997: 37-39), who sees this part of the description as a typical example of what he calls 'mimetic discourse', in that it is 'presented from the internal standpoint of the observer', but

experience that is offered to readers is one of medical observation, the external perspective, as opposed to vicarious experience of disease.[18] In this respect, Thucydides' description is similar to the observation-based approaches in some of the Hippocratic texts such as in *Epidemics I* and *III* (a resemblance that has been discussed elsewhere, and that I analyse further below).[19]

Crucially, however, Thucydides *is* interested in subjective experience of disease. Though his declared purpose is to speak of 'what sort of thing it was/became', the nature or quality of the plague, that is, rather than what it felt like to have it, he emphasises that his evidence comes from personal experience *and* observation of others (αὐτός τε νοσήσας καὶ αὐτὸς ἰδὼν ἄλλους πάσχοντας, 2.48.3), implying that one of these two would be inferior to their combination.[20] Moreover, he moves on in paragraph 49 to set up an antithesis between what was felt and seen from the outside (τὸ μὲν ἔξωθεν, 2.49.5) and sensation on the inside (τὰ δὲ ἐντός, 2.49.5).[21] To the doctor, or observing historian, victims' bodies were not excessively hot to the touch or pale: their bodies' surfaces were reddish, livid, and flowering with blisters and sores. By contrast, what was felt within was 'burning' heat (ἐκάετο,

acknowledges that it is here characterised by '*generic remembering*', a 'specific universality'; note 48. On the head-to-toe approach as characteristic of 'a neophyte modern medical student', see Morgan (1994: 203-4). A similar approach in a different context: Ov. *Am.* 1.5.19-22.

[18] This distinction is important: though Thucydides may 'enmesh' his readers in his past (see Grethlein (2013: 114-18) on the 'presence' of Thucydides' past), the resulting experience is characterised by exteriority.

[19] See note 5. Indeed, the sophistic defence of medicine in the Hippocratic treatise called *The Art* makes a running theme of visibility; what is visible must exist (para. 2), what can be 'seen' (by eyes or mind) can be healed (para. 11), and so on: disease is obscure, and the art of medicine is reliant on communication by the sick and observation by doctors (para. 11). See further Perilli (2018) on Hippocratic epistemologies; Thumiger (2018) on doctor-patient communication; notes 13 and 15. On the affinity between medical observation and spectatorship or *theoria* (as articulated by later critics), see Lane Fox (2020: 212).

[20] Indeed, first-person experience is another characteristic of medical texts such as *Epidemics I* and *III*: see Thomas (2006: 101-2). See further Marincola (1997: esp. 67-69) on Thucydides' claims to authority as a historian and, especially, his guarantee of autopsy and inquiry (and rigorous analysis of the evidence provided by both).

[21] Antithesis and Thucydides' prose style: Denniston (1952: 13, 73-74); Parry (1989: 180-94).

2.49.5), unremitting thirst (δίψῃ ἀπαύστῳ, 2.49.5). To some extent it was possible to deduce internal experience from observation of patients' behaviour: the fact that victims stripped their bodies naked and actually threw themselves into water containers implies that they felt an uncomfortable heat. But more subjective details provided by Thucydides claim omniscient knowledge of others' motivation, discomfort, pleasure and appetite: even light or linen clothing was 'unendurable' (μήτε […] μηδε […] ἀνέχεσθαι, 2.49.5); throwing themselves into cold water 'would bring the most pleasure' (ἥδιστά τε ἄν, 2.49.5); drinking deeply or sparingly 'made little difference' (καὶ ἐν τῷ ὁμοίῳ καθειστήκει τό τε πλέον καὶ ἔλασσον ποτόν, 2.49.5). Inability to rest or sleep 'lay upon' (ἐπέκειτο, 2.49.6) the victims, and sometimes, on recovery, complete amnesia, which 'took hold' (ἐλάμβανε, 2.49.8). Thucydides hints not just at a medical situation, but at the experience of victims, who felt attacked, oppressed, manhandled.

There are several possible sources for Thucydides' apparent knowledge of internal experience of the plague.[22] His knowledge may reflect details communicated by patients during the illness; it may be derived from Thucydides' personal experience of the disease; it may (as stated above) be conjecture based on observing patient behaviour. Regarding the first two of these, it is striking that Thucydides emphasises the internal sensation of not just heat, but fire: the insides are 'on fire' (ἐκάετο, 2.49.5); the body is not 'quenched' (ἐμαραίνετο, 2.49.6) by the disease but continues in strength until the seventh or ninth day when it is destroyed by 'the internal burning heat' (τοῦ ἐντὸς καύματος, 2.49.6).[23] The metaphorical language

[22] This is an example of Thucydides' apparent knowledge of others' thoughts. On this phenomenon, see, for example, Rengakos (2006b: 281-84) on 'internal focalisation' (and its Homeric and Herodotean ancestry).
[23] On fieriness as a feature of *Epidemics I* and *II*: Lane Fox (2020: 228-30).

of fire to communicate pain felt within (a pain that was not connected to any real heat that could be detected by touching the body) is characteristic of the figurative language used to communicate indescribable pain. Consider the vocabulary gathered in the Melzack and Torgerson questionnaire discussed by Elaine Scarry, where patients talk of pain as 'burning', 'hot', 'flickering', 'searing', and so on.[24] Though consistencies in language (in Thucydides, the 'thermal' theme and, possibly, a 'temporal' theme of continuous pain that is not 'quenched') do communicate meaningful information that might be helpful for diagnosis and treatment,[25] the symbolic nature of the language (not this, but something *like* this) indicates the obstacles to sharing an experience.[26] As Scarry says, 'To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*.'[27] The language of what was felt within, whether drawn from Thucydides' own experience, from the words of the victims he observed, or both, must be imaginative and approximate, however suggestive. For sufferers, let alone observers, the experience defies language or reason.[28]

Thucydides' description is thus simultaneously characterised by observation and description, and by an attention to exteriority that provokes epistemological reflection. In this respect, his account resembles medical treatises; putting aside the

[24] Scarry (1985: 6-9). For recent reflections upon *The Body in Pain* and its legacies, see Dawney and Huzar (2019). See further, Budelmann (2006: 137-38); note 35.
[25] The utility of the diagnostic tool and categories such as 'temporal and 'thermal' are discussed by Scarry at pp. 7-8. Her wider point is the inexpressibility of pain (pp. 3-11).
[26] Though see Budelmann (2006: 128-33) on the paradox of pain, inherently understandable (he cites Terry Eagleton) and uncommunicable (he cites Virginia Woolf and the prevalence of metaphorical language in pain description).
[27] Scarry (1985: 13), rephrasing Wittgenstein (1953: 89 (I.246)).
[28] The problematic nature of attempts by patients to report their illnesses is also discussed in *The Art*, para. 11. Compare King (2017: 17-21), on pain, language, representation and experience in the imperial period, including discussion of Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) at pp. 18-19, and n. 47 on eighteenth-century debates on pain and language.

question of influence or familiarity with medical terminology,[29] the authority that he draws from first-person experience and his detailed account of symptoms and the disease's progress gives his description a medical style and method akin to that in *Epidemics I* and *III*.[30]

More interesting within the context of this chapter, however, is Rosalind Thomas' discussion of Thucydides' emphasis on the helplessness of the medical profession and his declaration that he, unlike the doctors (and others), will not discuss its origins and causes.[31] Though his explicit purpose is to describe the disease such that others can identify it in the future, his implicit aim, or at least his overriding interest, appears less medical and more existential: his point is that the plague defies treatment or understanding (discussed further below).[32] In this respect, as Thomas observes, in some ways his narrative has more in common with a tragedy than a medical treatise.

[29] Discussed in Page (1953); rejected in Parry (1969); revisited with nuance in Thomas (2006: 95-97).

[30] On this resemblance, see especially Thomas (2006: 95-104), and also her emphasis (pp. 93-95) on the diversity of the Hippocratic corpus, which includes texts written by different authors in different styles at different times (from the late fifth century to the fourth). Indeed, *Epidemics I* and *III* contain material of different sorts: 'constitutions' and case histories. The case histories, especially, differ in style from Thucydides' *History*. The constitutions are more akin to history in that they summarise the year's weather and ailments, but differ in that they, like the case histories, include details in brief and ungrammatical note form. Compare the flowing prose with which Thucydides treats his account and the political event with which he opens it (in contrast to the weather statements that punctuate case studies); these distinguish his writing as narrative history within a military-social-political frame. Thucydides' discussion of the social impact of the plague has a similar effect: see Thomas (2006: 105). Thomas also notes that Thucydides does not (unlike some Hippocratic writers) mention the plague's causes (p. 100).

[31] Thomas (2006: 102).

[32] Indeed, Thucydides' focus on incomprehension and helplessness might communicate psychological pain: see Budelmann (2006: 130-31) on pain narratives and the interaction of body and mind in pain.

The dramatic characteristics of the plague have been explored elsewhere, notably by Adam Parry.[33] However, one important difference between representations of sickness and death in Thucydides' *History* and in a tragedy such as Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* is that the dramatic format and interests of the latter both accommodate and make a feature of interaction between spectators and suffering individuals.[34] In staging the excruciating death of Herakles at the end of the play, Sophocles gives space not just to Herakles' real time efforts to communicate his pain but to the affective responses of his observers.[35] At 1023-42, for example, Herakles screams in an alternating rhythm of lyrics and hexameters, mingling guttural shrieks 'e e!' (ἔ ἔ), protracted groans 'io io' (ἰὼ ἰώ), and pressured speech characteristic of frenzy, as in ἀποτίβατος ἀγρία νόσος, a rapid string of light syllables.[36] Herakles still communicates his pain in metaphors: the disease leaps and darts (θρῴσκει […] θρῴσκει, 1027); it mauls him (λωβᾶται, 1031); it has eaten his flesh (βέβρωκε σάρκας, 1054) and drunk his blood (αἷμά μου | πέπωκεν, 1055-1056); it is like a wild animal. But the chorus' reaction hints at an affective response that is physical as well as emotional: 'I shudder to hear the misfortune' (κλύουσ'

[33] Parry (1969: 113-16). On Thucydides and tragedy, see further Cornford (1907: esp. ch. 8) (Aeschylus); Finley (1967: 1-54) (Euripides); Macleod (1983: ch. 13); Alsina (1984) (Sophocles); Ponchon (2017: 193-203) (on Thucydides' tragic use of medical discourse to unveil the chaotic nature of the world and the intrinsic weakness of human nature).

[34] In this respect, Thucydides' account also differs from Xenophon's description of his interaction with soldiers suffering from *boulimia*: see note 73.

[35] On representation of pain on the tragic stage, see Budelmann (2006, esp. 134-41), (2010: 111-13). The bibliography on the art of pain and suffering is extensive and spans thousands of years: consider Seneca's imaginary account of how Parrhasios tortured a slave to provide a model for his painting of Prometheus (Sen. *Controv.* 10.5) or the canonical status of the statue of Laocoon in the Vatican museums and the debate that it stirred between Johann Winckelmann and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in the eighteenth century. For more recent discussions on art and pain, see Spivey (2001); Sontag (2003); Nelson (2010). See further King (2017: 6-10) on Perkins (1995) and Coakley (2007), two studies that emphasise the cultural and historical aspects of pain, and n. 19 of his study for further scholarship on representations of pain in archaic and classical art.

[36] His pain is also conveyed by the 'excited series of commands, questions and exclamations': Easterling (1982: 200) on 1004-43.

ἔφριξα τάσδε συμφοράς, 1044).[37] There appears to be some limited transference of bodily experience.

In Thucydides' account of the plague, by contrast, those among the living who feel most pity for the dying and suffering are those who have previously experienced and recovered from the plague *and who consider themselves to be immune* (2.51.6). The latter detail is crucial. Personal experience of the disease (an impossibility in the case of death) might make it easier for survivors to feel pity for others, but what prevented even relatives from visiting those dying from the plague was in many cases fear, not lack of pity (or, at least, fear outweighed pity) (2.51.5). Though Thucydides tells us that some, motivated by a sense of shame (αἰσχύνῃ) and a desire to be virtuous (οἱ ἀρετῆς τι μεταποιούμενοι, 2.51.5),[38] did visit the diseased despite not being immune (and so died), it appears that for the most part the responses of the living to the suffering and dying were conditioned by self-interest.

To some extent, this account of the Athenian people's self-centred responses to the predicament of the diseased opens a window onto another sort of exteriority that governs response to the plague in Thucydides' account: the exteriority that underpins Thucydides' methodological approach in the *History*. Thucydides says that his purpose in describing the plague is to enable others to recognise it in the future (not, crucially, to enable others to sympathise or empathise; not to provide others with a vicarious experience of the disease). Reducing a diseased or dying

[37] Though emotions and bodily experience are not necessarily separable: see Cairns (2016) on φρίκη as an emotion-metaphor founded upon a physical symptom.
[38] Gomme (1956: 157) on 2.51.5 suggests 'primarily courage and a sense of duty, not kindliness'. See further Hutchinson (2013b: 211-12) on Thucydides' 'elegant dilemma on care' in these lines.

person to an object of and for another's study leaves little space for acknowledgement of or vicarious encounter with that person's experience.

On this note, I return to the epigraph of this part of my chapter (*History* 2.50.1):

> γενόμενον γὰρ κρεῖσσον λόγου τὸ εἶδος τῆς νόσου…
>
> For the form of the disease was beyond reckoning…

In these words, Thucydides seems to acknowledge the challenge posed by a chasm latent within the word εἶδος. What he seeks to capture in his writing is the very essence of the disease, that which distinguishes it from others and which will enable others in the future to recognise it, should it reoccur. But εἶδος also holds a less abstract meaning, a meaning that is more superficial, as it were: 'appearance', 'visible shape'. The word εἶδος shifts between what *can be observed* and what *is*, the essence, 'pattern', 'nature', 'kind' that might be extrapolated from an object's aspects.[39] This shift is problematic, and is (in diverse ways) at the heart of Thucydides' treatment of the plague. The plague account thus draws attention to a problem with which he grapples more widely as a historian. Consider one section of his 'archaeology' of Greek history in Book 1, in which he advances his methodology (*History* 1.10.2):

> Λακεδαιμονίων γὰρ εἰ ἡ πόλις ἐρημωθείη, λειφθείη δὲ τά τε ἱερὰ καὶ τῆς κατασκευῆς τὰ ἐδάφη, πολλὴν ἂν οἶμαι ἀπιστίαν τῆς δυνάμεως προελθόντος πολλοῦ χρόνου τοῖς ἔπειτα πρὸς τὸ κλέος αὐτῶν εἶναι […] Ἀθηναίων δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο παθόντων διπλασίαν ἂν τὴν δύναμιν εἰκάζεσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς φανερᾶς ὄψεως τῆς πόλεως ἢ ἔστιν.

[39] Object-oriented ontology is relevant here: see note 58 on page 33. The object of historical enquiry is, like all objects, elusive. Indeed, this word (εἶδος) brings its own ancient philosophical discourse: Plato's use of the word to communicate the unchanging world of ideas, the Forms. This seems to be another example of how the new Socratic philosophy drew upon cultural ideas surrounding viewing and sight to differentiate its purpose and methodology from that of the pre-Socratics: see Nightingale (2004) on *theoria* and 'spectacles' of truth. See further Petraki (Forthcoming) on Plato's use of sculptural language to articulate the creative process of philosophical thought; note 82 on page 184.

> For if the Spartans' city were to be deserted, but the temples and the foundations were left, I think that, as time went by, there would be great disbelief in their power amongst future generations when faced with their renown […] whereas if the Athenians suffered the same fate, their power would be judged double what it actually is, based on the visible appearance of the city.

There is a difference between what can be seen and what can be known.[40] Nevertheless, Thucydides professes confidence in his ability to communicate the 'sort of things' (τοιαῦτα) that happened in the early history of the Athenians (1.21.1). But the challenge remains, and it permeates the contemporary history that comprises the primary object of his enquiry. There, too, the 'clear truth' that his account will offer relies upon the painstaking way (ἐπιπόνως) in which he discovered it from conflicting reports (1.22.3-4).[41] The gap between perception and knowledge caused Thucydides, like many in the fifth and fourth centuries (and earlier), anxiety. His account of the plague thus offers a microcosm of a larger historiographical problem; indeed, it magnifies the problem by opposing not just truth and appearance (what 'is' the plague versus what it looked like) but also appearance and experience (the distance between the symptom and the subject).[42] This coincidence generates a distinctive sort of encounter with death, an encounter charged with epistemological anxiety.

MISSING THE TREES FOR THE WOOD

I now turn to another epistemological point raised by Thucydides' account of the plague: the potential divergence between truth for the purposes of his history, and

[40] On this passage and Thucydides' critique of oral sources versus material culture, see Hedrick (1993: 27-28).
[41] On Thucydides' claim to *akribeia* and to authority, and the embarrassment caused him by speeches, see Crane (1996: 27-74). See note 59.
[42] On the symptom and its relationship with (and shaping of) the subject, see Holmes (2010).

truth from the individual perspectives of those that suffered and died, not just in the plague, but the war. What is at stake in summarising a disease (or a battle)—in painstakingly producing one account from many?[43] This part of the chapter continues to align the epistemological problems raised by Thucydides account of plague with his reflections on his historiographical practice, but delves more directly into what these parallels do for existential reflection by folding in other parts of his history in which death comes to the fore.

Let us begin with the impact of the plague upon a multitude of bodies and the collective body politic.[44] Emphasis has been placed on Thucydides' representation of the socio-cultural *fragmentation* that results from the plague.[45] Indeed, the civil disorder in the wake of the plague has been aligned with the social disintegration at Corcyra in Book 3 and both, together, have been treated as a foil to the vision of cohesive Athenian society in Pericles' funeral oration.[46] But though the picture that emerges towards the end of Thucydides' account of the plague is unarguably one of dissolution, it is also worth thinking about his emphasis on massing, piling, agglomeration—not cohesion, as such, but amorphous solution.[47]

Consider the grim spectacle in paragraph 52:

> Ἐπίεσε δ' αὐτοὺς μᾶλλον πρὸς τῷ ὑπάρχοντι πόνῳ καὶ ἡ ξυγκομιδὴ ἐκ τῶν ἀγρῶν ἐς τὸ ἄστυ, καὶ οὐχ ἧσσον τοὺς ἐπελθόντας. οἰκιῶν γὰρ οὐχ ὑπαρχουσῶν, ἀλλ' ἐν καλύβαις πνιγηραῖς ὥρᾳ ἔτους διαιτωμένων ὁ

[43] This echoes the point made about the battle piece in John Keegan's *The Face of Battle*, which has proved so influential on debates surrounding the ontology and ethics of battle historiography: Keegan (1991: esp. 62-73); he cites Thucydides with approval. For a recent engagement with this discourse with reference to the ancient historiography of battle, see Huitink (Forthcoming), discussed in chapter four (page 253, including note 117).
[44] See Brock (2000) on the metaphor of sickness for political disorder in Greek literature.
[45] See Winton (1992: 206-7), for example.
[46] See Orwin (1988: esp. 841-43).
[47] Compare here Bruzzone (2017) on how Thucydides writes within a literary tradition of 'compound misfortune' (war and plague or famine, and so on). Death piles up on multiple levels.

φθόρος ἐγίγνετο οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ, ἀλλὰ καὶ νεκροὶ ἐπ᾽ ἀλλήλοις ἀποθνῄσκοντες ἔκειντο καὶ ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς ἐκαλινδοῦντο καὶ περὶ τὰς κρήνας ἁπάσας ἡμιθνῆτες τοῦ ὕδατος ἐπιθυμίᾳ. τά τε ἱερὰ ἐν οἷς ἐσκήνηντο νεκρῶν πλέα ἦν, αὐτοῦ ἐναποθνῃσκόντων· ὑπερβιαζομένου γὰρ τοῦ κακοῦ οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οὐκ ἔχοντες ὅτι γένωνται, ἐς ὀλιγωρίαν ἐτράποντο καὶ ἱερῶν καὶ ὁσίων ὁμοίως. νόμοι τε πάντες ξυνεταράχθησαν οἷς ἐχρῶντο πρότερον περὶ τὰς ταφάς, ἔθαπτον δὲ ὡς ἕκαστος ἐδύνατο. καὶ πολλοὶ ἐς ἀναισχύντους θήκας ἐτράποντο σπάνει τῶν ἐπιτηδείων διὰ τὸ συχνοὺς ἤδη προτεθνάναι σφίσιν· ἐπὶ πυρὰς γὰρ ἀλλοτρίας φθάσαντες τοὺς νήσαντας οἱ μὲν ἐπιθέντες τὸν ἑαυτῶν νεκρὸν ὑφῆπτον, οἱ δὲ καιομένου ἄλλου ἐπιβαλόντες ἄνωθεν ὃν φέροιεν ἀπῇσαν.

What squeezed them all the more, on top of the distress they already suffered, was also the crowding from the fields into the city, and this had just as much of an impact on the incomers. For since there were not enough houses, and since, instead, they were living in huts that were stifling at that time of year, the destruction became out of control, and instead corpses were lying upon one another as they died, and half-dead bodies were rolling in the streets and around all the fountains desperate for water. And the temples in which they were camped were full of corpses, as people were dying right there inside them; for the disaster was forcing itself violently upon them, and so the people, with no idea what would happen to them, were turned to contempt of divine and mortal laws alike. And all the customs that previously they would observe in burials were confounded, and they began burying as each one could, and many were forced into dishonourable graves for want of resources because so many of their family had already died; for some got to other people's pyres first and, putting their own corpse on it instead, set it alight, whereas others, if another pyre was already burning, threw the corpse that they were bringing on top of the other and went away.

Things fall apart: funerary customs and respect for the laws of men and the gods (this escalates in paragraph 53). But the destruction has a thoroughly centripetal force. Crammed into the city, confined in suffocating huts and temples, bodies squeeze together living, dying and dead. Death comes with a stifling pressure: the influx of people that weighs down upon (ἐπίεσε) the Athenians; their containment in huts that 'choke' (καλύβαις πνιγηραῖς, 2.52.2). These are situations of ambiguous metaphor, literal death or unbearable suffering, and both are claustrophobic. Thucydides also piles up detail upon detail with καί after καί (eight in total, nine

following Gomme's suggested emendation).[48] Progression of meaning throughout the passage reinforces accumulation: temples (ἱερά, 2.52.3) are full of dying bodies; men are turned to neglect things sacred by the laws of the gods (ἱερῶν, 52.3) and mankind (ὁσίων, 52.3); the laws of mankind (νόμοι, 52.4) are thrown into confusion. The repetitions in vocabulary (ἱερά, ἱερῶν) and meaning (laws of man: ὁσίων, νόμοι) relay images and concepts, moving readers through the paragraph in incremental stages; spreading from one thing to another, the situation snowballs (it 'becomes', 'develops', 'unfolds' without order: ἐγίγνετο οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ) like the massing bodies. A profusion of compound words (ἀποθνήσκοντες, ἡμιθνῆτες, ἐναποθνῃσκόντων, προτεθνάναι, ὑπερβιαζομένου, ξυνεταράχθησαν, ἐπιθέντες, ὑφῆπτον, ἐπιβαλόντες) intensifies the feeling of agglomeration; the fact that several of these are concerned with dying—to which we might add three instances of 'corpse' or 'dying person' (νεκροί, νεκρῶν, νεκρόν)—associates that feeling with death, offering another literary foil to the heaped pyres on which the living place, or toss, their dead.[49]

In part, this contributes to the exceptional horror of the plague: the situation is not ordinary, and neither are the deaths or the responses to them (this is precisely what makes the treatment of the dead so shocking; it deviates from custom). Indeed, Thucydides culminated his list in Book 1 of the natural disasters that accompanied the war with the plague—more harmful and destructive than all.[50] But the massing of bodies also introduces a more existential point: with the group (especially the

[48] Gomme (1956: 158) on 2.52.2.
[49] See note 55.
[50] 1.23.3: καὶ ἡ οὐχ ἥκιστα βλάψασα καὶ μέρος τι φθείρασα ἡ λοιμώδης νόσος.

disordered group) comes a loss of the individual.[51] The whole paragraph is concerned with dissipation of what makes these people distinctive—distinctive as Greeks, Athenians, and people. The confusion of the social and cultural fabric (in *ξυν*εταράχθησαν, again, Thucydides emphasises the coming together, not the falling apart, of things) is combined with loss of agency. The dying (or dead) 'were rolling about' (ἐκαλινδοῦντο); men 'are turned' towards neglect of the sacred or towards shameful burials (the word occurs twice). Together with the sense of motion, there is a general confusion of living and dead, action and inaction. Verbs work equally well in the middle or passive: the dying roll, or the dead are rolled; men turn themselves, or are turned. And, in the latter case, Thucydides' language leaves it obscure as to whether the things that 'the many' (πολλοί, 2.52.4) turn or are turned towards are shameful 'graves', or shameful 'modes of burial': both meanings are conceivable for θήκας. In the context of more general attention to the responses of the living rather than the plight of the dead, the most natural (and usual) interpretation is that the living are forced to resort to the sort of burial actions that are subsequently described: hijacking other people's pyres. But in a passage where νεκροί at one moment seems to mean 'the dead', and at another 'dying people', and participles for death are in the present (ἀποθνῄσκοντες, ἐναποθνῃσκόντων, 2.52.2-3), dying is very much a continuum, with some hanging in limbo, 'half-dead' (ἡμιθνῆτες, 2.52.2), while they die.[52] The general sense of

[51] See especially Girard (1974: 833-34), 'The plague is presented as a process of undifferentiation, a destruction of specificities'. See further Cooke (2009: 2) on the 'social and political dimension' to plague as a 'community affliction' in contrast to illnesses such as cancer, which are seen to afflict individuals (discussed in Sontag (2002)). For emphasis (in a different context) on how 'epidemic was regarded as a collective experience rather than as individual ailments', see Boeckl (2000: 154) on plague imagery in European art from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

[52] These are combined with imperfect verbs, for example ἔκειντο, ἐκαλινδοῦντο. According to Bakker (1997: esp. 37-39) on aspect in Thucydides, the imperfects in this scene correspond to an internal viewpoint, description as opposed to narration, that is characterised by '*generic remembering*' not knowing; see note 17.

disorder (both in arrangement and existential state) renders all, living and dead, in the same situation: all are helpless. In this respect, though the sheer numbers of people that died in the plague in a short period of time and from the same cause is extraordinary, the mass death puts pressure upon the universalising force of death *per se*. Insofar as death happens to everyone, it is universal. But ordinarily people die individually. Can and should deaths be squeezed together like this? The implications of this question are epistemological and historiographical, as well as ethical.

Having emphasised the exceptional nature of the plague, it is worth briefly considering what deaths look like elsewhere in Thucydides' *History.* Though Thucydides wrote a history of war, and a war that he says had a lot of bloodshed (φόνος, 1.23.2), he spent little time dwelling upon death. His Peloponnesian War is unlike Homer's Trojan War in that we rarely, almost never, see individual soldiers die. We rarely even see groups die, though sometimes victories or defeats acknowledge casualty numbers or the return of the bodies of the dead. Nevertheless, there are other examples in his *History* where he dwells upon slaughter and dying, and it is significant that these situations have much in common with the plague.

Consider that other moment of extreme (and exceptional) Athenian suffering, despair and mass death: the disastrous end of the Sicilian expedition. In their last stand by the river Assinarus, Nicias' army are forced to move in an impossibly dense mass (ἀθρόοι γὰρ ἀναγκαζόμενοι χωρεῖν, 7.84.3); falling and trampling upon one another, they end up trapped in confusion in a hollow of the river, where they are slaughtered by the Peloponnesians. Finally, Nicias surrendered, 'by which time

many bodies were lying upon one another' (νεκρῶν τε πολλῶν ἐπ' ἀλλήλοις ἤδη κειμένων, 7.85.1). Later, once the survivors are imprisoned in the marble quarries (7.87.1-2), Thucydides hammers home the cramped conditions, with many (πολλούς) confined in a small and hollow space (ἐν γὰρ κοίλῳ χωρίῳ ὄντας καὶ ὀλίγῳ) a space so small that the dead are piled together all on top of one another (he reiterates the heap with an accumulation of words to communicate amalgamation: *καὶ προσέτι* τῶν νεκρῶν *ὁμοῦ ἐπ'* ἀλλήλοις *ξυννενημένων*). Other things being equal, it might seem unsurprising that Thucydides should dwell upon piles of bodies when describing moments of exceptional devastation: the plague or the defeat in Sicily. But in the context of eight books in which limited space is given to death, these moments stand out, not just for the mass Athenian deaths that they present, but also because both emphasise in a similar way the quantity *and the quality* of the deaths: in both cases, bodies, dead and alive, are pressed closely together in cramped spaces.[53]

Now compare an encounter with death in the *History* that is, in many ways, the polar opposite of these: Pericles' funeral speech (2.35-46). It is near impossible to think about death and the dead in this speech without recourse to Nicole Loraux and her point that there are no 'beautiful dead' in this speech; the speech emphasises not the bodies of the dead, but the abstraction that they exemplify, the 'beautiful

[53] See Rood (2012: 159) on the 'dense physicality' of these two descriptions (and the suggestion that this reveals 'the cost of Athens' geographical reach'); Joho (2016: 39-41) for further links between Thucydides' accounts of the plague and the imprisonment in the quarries, and the argument that the narrative patterning draws attention to the destructive force of human nature: 'human nature has taken the place that mythical thinkers attributed to the divine' (p. 48). The slaughter at Corcyra in Book 4.48 is also comparable (though the deaths are not Athenian). Thucydides describes how the members of the defeated Corcyraean party were attacked and slaughtered while contained in a building; at the end of the night, the Corcyraean popular party throw the corpses onto wagons 'like mat-work', 'like a basket' or 'arranged cross-wise' (φορμηδόν, 4.48.4). Again, mass death is effected in a small space. This time, the pile of the dead has an order to it that, in its own way, depersonalises the dead: bodies are treated like matter for craft, woven anew into a cohesive object.

death'.[54] Apart from the fact that most of the speech focuses not on the war dead, but on cultural and political supremacy of Athens, the references to death and the dead are brief and mostly generalised.[55] This is clear above all in the moment when Thucydides' Pericles offers a window into the minds of hoplites during the battle, on the cusp of death (2.42.4):

> καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἀμύνεσθαι καὶ παθεῖν μᾶλλον ἡγησάμενοι ἢ [τὸ] ἐνδόντες σῴζεσθαι, τὸ μὲν αἰσχρὸν τοῦ λόγου ἔφυγον, τὸ δ' ἔργον τῷ σώματι ὑπέμειναν καὶ δι' ἐλαχίστου καιροῦ τύχης ἅμα ἀκμῇ τῆς δόξης μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ δέους ἀπηλλάγησαν.
>
> And in the very moment of defending themselves, thinking it better even to suffer death than to surrender and save themselves, they fled from what might be shameful in words, and submitted to the deed against their body and, in the briefest moment of their fate, the very pinnacle of renown rather than fear, they departed.

The difference between these deaths (in the words of Thucydides' Pericles) and the deaths told in Thucydides' account of the plague and the Sicilian defeat, is vast. These men are not destroyed, they 'depart' (ἀπηλλάγησαν); they (appear to) feel no pain; their bodies do not accumulate in piles. They also, apparently, made the right choice, the choice to stay and die gloriously, rather than to surrender and to save themselves.[56] Most importantly, these men have been given due honours: the *patrios nomos*. Insofar as Pericles' speech generates encounters with death amidst a vision of perfect and idealised civic cohesion, it sits in contrast to the disorderly

[54] Loraux (1982); see note 104 on page 249.
[55] Though Pericles does, at the conclusion of the speech, invite his audience to lament their loved ones individually before departing: νῦν δὲ ἀπολοφυράμενοι ὃν προσήκει ἑκάστῳ ἄπιτε (2.46.2). On the contrasts between the language here—and, indeed, the customary behaviour of the Athenians that Thucydides describes in 2.34.7 (μετὰ δέ τοῦτο ἀπέρχονται)—and the cursory departure of Athenians (ἀπῆσαν, 2.52.4) after using other people's pyres during the plague (ἐπὶ πυρὰς γὰρ ἀλλοτρίας […] καιομένου ἄλλου, 2.54.4), see Hutchinson (2013b: 213-15).
[56] The Athenians in the plague and at the river Assinarus had no such choice—or, at least, they did not have the option to save themselves. Nevertheless, there may be an implicit ethical comparison here between the choice made by the war dead and the 'choices' made by some Athenians in the plague (though Thucydides' use of verbs such as ἐτράποντο in 2.52 suggest that this agency was taken from them: see page 284). Indeed, on Jeffrey Rusten's analysis and translation (Rusten (1986)), Thucydides' Pericles' emphasises the rationality of the hoplites in the very moment that they chose to fight; the rationality underpinning this choice can be contrasted with the chaos in which choices are made during the plague and in defeat.

deaths of the plague and at Sicily, which present a mass and nameless equivalent of the Homeric disfigured corpse.[57]

There are, nevertheless, ways of complicating this picture, not so much to depart from it as to probe its more existential implications. Consider, for example, what is *similar* about these encounters. All three passages present a loss of the individual in death: in one case, persons are piled into a chaotic mess of bodies; in the other, bodies and identities disappear into a coherent, idealised 'they'.[58] The political implications of the treatment of the war dead in fifth-century Athens have been much discussed: it was not just in a funeral speech such as this (apparently in the sort of words, if not the exact words, that, in Thucydides' opinion, Pericles would have used in his speech)[59] that the war dead were stripped of their individuality, but in the inscriptions on casualty reliefs, which included only the name and the tribe (not the patronymic or deme), and occasionally the military position held.[60] Loraux, like others, has explored ways in which this generalised public death (and the associated restrictions that were placed on public display of private mourning) might have been (on its own) emotionally unsatisfactory, with tragedy providing an

[57] The fires of corpses that burn during the plague of Hom. *Il*. 1.52 are also 'close-set'.
[58] On this point, note especially Orwin (1994: 182): 'Stasis and plague concur in suggesting that there is no greater political misfortune for human beings than to be freed from the constraint posed by their bodies. Both phenomena thus comment on the Funeral Oration. […] The Funeral Oration, despite or because of its genre, consistently abstracts from death and the body. The plague, by contrast, brings home both the primacy and frailty of the body—as well as its centrality to actual political life in Athens as elsewhere.' See further Ober (2009: 451-54) on the public-private tension in Pericles' funeral speech; Taylor (2009: 64-74) on Thucydides' criticism of Pericles' idealized vision of Athens as 'an immaterial *polis* unbounded by the physical' in his funeral speech.
[59] *History* 1.22.1. On Thucydides' speeches (and a convention, resulting from 1.22, that speeches in Greek and Roman historiography '[required] accurate reproduction in substance, always with the possibility, when necessary, of expansion, truncation, or reduction'), see Fornara (1983: ch. 4, citation at 145). See further Wilson (1982); note 41.
[60] Note, too, private gravestones such as that of Chairedemos and Lykeas at Salamis (Archaeological Museum of Piraeus: 385): these two are named and distinguished, and they have been given a private monument that is separate from the casualty lists in which their names also appear; they are also, however, homogenised, shown as quintessential hoplites despite the possibility that Lykeas, for example, was possibly a trierarch. See Arrington (2015: 222-23).

outlet for the 'mourning voice'.[61] What, then, does it do to position one sort of state-sanctioned, largely de-personalised mass death (the funeral speech) alongside an account of plague in which the impersonal treatment of the dead (thrown on any pyre available) is deeply disturbing—and intended to be so? At a high level, what we have in the speech and in the plague are two situations in which large-scale death puts bodies in an amorphous mass: one apparently good; one manifestly terrifying. The claim is that these are different situations, but the massing of one with the other within the same book and, in turn, with a tragedy such as the defeat at Sicily within the same work, turns attention upon a shift between the individual and the general that (from an existential perspective) is ethically, and epistemologically, problematic.

On this note, let us revisit my earlier comparison between Thucydides' account of the plague, a treatise such as *Epidemics III*, and the staging of Herakles' death in the *Women of Trachis*. *Epidemics III* includes a series of case studies of individuals, individuals that are occasionally named and often distinguished.[62] Cases 4 and 5, for example, concern Philistes and Chaerion, while 6 concerns the young daughter of Euryanax and 8 a young man who was lying at the Liars' Market. Likewise, Sophocles presents us with an individual: Herakles. In several essential ways Herakles differs, of course, from real Athenian subjects: he is a mythological hero; he will attain immortality; his situation and ontology are exceptional.[63] The subjects that populate the case studies of *Epidemics III* are, by contrast, ordinary. But, albeit

[61] Loraux (2002: esp. 50-53, 87-90). See further Loraux (1986a: 42-56) on the shift effected by the funeral speech from lament (*threnos*) to praise (*epainos*); note 54.
[62] On the lack of interest in individual experience in patient cases of the *Epidemics*, see Thumiger (2018: 264), though in the rest of the chapter she delves deeper into the doctor-patient relationship.
[63] See further my conclusion to chapter three.

in different ways, both Herakles and the medical subjects are exemplary sufferers. Herakles offers an icon, not for admiration as such, but in that he stands as a representative of cultural ideas and associations and so can mediate reflection upon social concerns such as suffering and death.[64] The medical subjects are also individuals, but the premise of the treatise is that they are members of a group and, through resemblance to one another as patients, can facilitate recognition and comprehension of medical conditions.[65] Thucydides takes this process one step further by skipping the individuals altogether. In the funeral speech, the homogenous fallen are presented as an exemplary group. Likewise, there are no individuals in his account of the plague; if anything, it is the plague itself, not its victims, that has exemplary force.[66] This returns us to the idea that Thucydides has given a medical phenomenon and a tragic event an existential and epistemological slant.

Let us examine this more thoroughly. In the *History*, the underlying challenge of describing disease experience feeds into a wider problem of approximation in description of the plague. How useful is any one example for representation of many? Thucydides acknowledges this obstacle in 2.51 when he explains that he has omitted many symptoms of the disease that were more unusual (ἀτοπίας, 2.51.1) because the plague's effect was distinct for different people (ὡς ἑκάστῳ ἐτύγχανέ

[64] Compare King (2017: 157-58) on how literary genres in Greek imperial culture reformulated ideas about pain and its language.
[65] On the feedback loop between primary evidence and generalisations and aphorisms in the Hippocratic corpus, see Langholf (1984: esp. 133-34). On the Hippocratic triangle of doctor, patient and illness, similarity, difference, and generalisation, see Perilli (2018: 130, 136-39). See further Lane Fox (2020: 218-19). De Romilly (1990: 121-23) also comments on how the approaches of the Hippocratics and Thucydides are both founded on identifying general principles from observations, concluding, 'Thucydide écrit l'histoire en clinicien'.
[66] Though note Budelmann (2006: 146-47) on staged pain as simultaneously emotive and thought-provoking as part of a larger narrative and an object of fascination in its own right.

τι διαφερόντως ἑτέρῳ πρὸς ἕτερον γιγνόμενον, 2.51.1).[67] What he offers is 'the general picture' (τοιοῦτον ἦν ἐπὶ πᾶν τὴν ἰδέαν, 2.51.1).[68] The word ἰδέα in particular, as a form, semblance, sort, kind, or idea, communicates that what Thucydides can represent is an impression, something similar in nature to the specific but only an approximation for the situation of each individual patient.[69] The dubious extent to which generalisation can accommodate a diverse set of phenomena is at the heart of the challenge of representing a widespread human experience, whether epidemic or death. This problem is there in tragedy and in the Hippocratic corpus, but Thucydides stages it more explicitly in his plague account as part of a methodological reflection.[70]

When it comes to Thucydides' description of plague within a wider frame of war and politics, the individual has already been sacrificed in the interests of society: the historian's purpose in describing the disease (or, rather, its general nature) was to enable posterity to identify it should it occur again (2.48.3). To some extent, in fact, the value of generalisation for historical purpose coincides with its value for social and political response to epidemic, or pandemic, in today's environment. The general has been essential both in terms of identifying common symptoms (the goal

[67] Compare 2.51.2, ἕν τε οὐδὲ ἓν κατέστη ἴαμα ('Absolutely no single remedy established itself', Hornblower's translation). There was no universal cure.
[68] Lloyd (2003: 126) observes that this distinguishes him from the authors of the *Epidemics*, but does not delve into the methodological problems. See especially Allison (1997: 65-73) on abstraction in Thucydides' plague description and the move from observed evidence to words and concepts, 'from event to *logos*'. Thucydides' predilection for abstract expression: Denniston (1952: 28, 40). Thucydides' interest in 'the human and the generic, the constants, and the larger general rules behind the observable world': Thomas (2006: 87). See note 11.
[69] Compare here de Romilly (2017: 182), 'In [Thucydides'] eyes history should always reach toward absolute intelligibility, though it never claims for all that to be able to attain it'. See further page 279 on εἶδος.
[70] This problem is also raised in Book 1. Consider the discussion of 1.22.3-4 on page 280: Thucydides says that he offers a clear view (τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν) gleaned from the painstaking review of eye-witness reports that did not say the same things (οὐ ταὐτὰ περί τῶν αὐτῶν ἔλεγον), either from bias or memory failure.

to which Thucydides' description seems targeted), and in terms of public response, where the interests of society's survival in general have been seen to outweigh individual or more localised experiences and liberties. Elaine Scarry's thinking on appropriation of pain for assertion of state power is illuminative here:

> As an actual physical fact, a weapon is an object that goes into the body and produces pain. As a perceptual fact, it lifts the pain out of the body and makes it visible or, more precisely, it acts as a bridge or mechanism across which some of pain's attributes—its incontestable reality, its totality, its ability to eclipse all else, its power of dramatic alteration and world dissolution—can be lifted away from their source, can be separated from the sufferer and referred to power, broken off from the body and attached instead to the regime.[71]

Though there is clearly no equivalence between the power to absorb individuals into a social group (whether through statistics or policy treatment) and the power to harness another's pain by torture, there is a common thread in terms of whether representation of a widespread experience can do justice to individual incidence. At a granular level, Thucydides' 'general picture' has generated a flood of scholarship attempting (and failing) to identify by what medical term we would now refer to the Athenian plague; tellingly, the sticking point in each case seems to be the mismatch of one or two specific symptoms.[72] From a more macro perspective, the problem of representing disease is a much larger one of *possibility* (overcoming subjective experience) and *methodology*. The specific problem of representing and accessing an individual's plague experience is implicated in a wider discourse as to the challenges of drawing general principles or patterns applicable to a larger group; the dubious value of generalisation carries implications

[71] Scarry (1985: 56).
[72] See note 4.

both for Thucydides' declared objectives as a historian and for more existential questions regarding what it is like to die.[73]

Thucydides experienced the disease himself and he observed others with it. But can one man's experience hold for another? How illuminating can personal testimony, or, indeed, near death experience, be? And for that matter, how helpful is another's example even in a circumstance where plague (or death) happens to affect all in the same way? Given that a victim's ability to grasp and describe their own subjective experience seems to falter in the face of plague, it is questionable how much closer even a personal insight can bring readers to an understanding of what it was like to have the disease. This sheds light on the statement in 2.50.1 with which Thucydides crowns his description: the 'shape', 'appearance' or 'nature' (εἶδος) of the plague defeated words or reason (κρεῖσσον λόγου) (see page 279).[74] What the plague was, its *nature*, is not just beyond Thucydides' powers of description or reasoning as a

[73] Relevant here is Ober (2009, esp. 446-47) on tensions between 'Thucydides *Histôr*' and 'Thucydides *Theôrêtikos*'. See further de Romilly (2005: 15-30) on the relationship between universality and occasionality in Thucydides; Kallet (2006: 353-56) on Thucydides' explicit emphasis on generalisation here as part of his pedagogical undertaking to his readers. Compare the accounts in Herodotus 1.105 (also 4.67) of the 'female disease' (θήλεαν νοῦσον) and Xenophon *Anabasis* 4.5.7-9 of 'cow hunger' (ἐβουλιμίασαν). Though there are notable differences in the types, declared origins and treatability of these diseases, and both historians at least gesture towards uncertainty, it is interesting that both appear confident in generalising about the disease (and, in Xenophon's case, about its cause and cure). Herodotus is clear that the disease can be observed amongst the Scythians, but undercuts the reliability of its divine cause (Aphrodite) with his formulation 'they say' (*pace* Lloyd (2003: 116-17)). Xenophon emphasises his initial ignorance as to what the disease was, but then gives two general statements as to its treatability akin to Hippocratic aphorisms (see note 65): a future vivid construction 'if they eat something, they will get up again' and a generic statement 'whenever they ate something, they would stand up and carry on marching'. Neither historian draws attention to the methodological problem of generalisation.

[74] Compare Marshall (1990: 167-70), who suggests that this phrase defends Pericles' reputation.

historian, but beyond any human reckoning.[75] This sense of the unfathomable is part of what prompts reflection on the inaccessible mystery of death.[76]

FAIR WORDS

In this final part, I consider the well-recognised poetics of Thucydides' writing in his account of the plague. Articles by Adam Parry and, more recently, Pantelis Michelakis are particularly important here.[77] I build upon their detailed discussions of the literary aspects of Thucydides' description (and the connections that Thucydides' language forges with other literary plagues such as those in the *Iliad* and *Oedipus the King*) to consider the epistemological implications of Thucydides' treatment of plague and death. Given the methodological reflections on exteriority and generality that his text generates, and the apparent influence of Hippocratic approaches upon his account, the poetic register in which he also chose to write about the plague is not just evocative, but polemical.

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[75] This flips Cochrane's optimistic account of Thucydides' 'science of history' (and kinship with Hippocratic writers) into a pessimistic account of the limitations of an empirical approach: see Cochrane (1929). See Thomas (2006: 104), 'the Plague is presented as an exception to rational explanation' and Cooke (2009: 43) on the 'creative endeavour' of writing plague. Compare Weidauer (1954: 21-31) on the meaning of εἶδος in Thucydides and Hippocratic texts ('Zustand' and 'Verfassung', 'condition' and 'constitution'): 'Daß so Außen und Innen für den beobachtenden Arzt zusammenfallen und mit ein und demselben Eindruck erfaßt werden können, zeigen noch folgende Beispiele […]' (the following examples show that outside and inside coincide for the observing doctor and can be grasped in one and the same impression) (p. 28). Note especially his comments on how the singular εἶδος represents a collective sickness (p. 31). See further Lloyd (2003: 122), 'the detailed description of the plague stands as a model for what [Thucydides] claims for his whole work. Both are validated on the assumption that they deal with *natures*…' Indeed, Michelakis (2019: 389-97) makes the point that the specific and paradigmatic nature of the plague does not just facilitate abstraction, but generates it.

[76] On the link between an experience that challenges social paradigms (specifically, the Black Death) and a society's re-conception of the world: Tuchmann (1978: 131).

[77] On 'the plague as a *literary* phenomenon' see especially Michelakis (2019). See further Mittelstadt (1968); Parry (1969); Morgan (1994: 205-6). On literary aspects of Thucydides' writing more generally, see, for example, Lateiner (1977) on *pathos* in Thucydides. For a history of scholarship on Thucydides, which has swung between emphasis on his *History* as science and art, see Murari Pires (2006).

A figurative mode of thought pervades the account, associating war, plague and death.[78] The partnership of 'war and plague' is established from the start, with the first outbreak of the plague following fast upon an invasion of the Peloponnesians with their allies (2.47.1-3). At a macro level, this association is reaffirmed in the ring-composition with which Thucydides concludes his narrative, reflections on the double scourge—plague and war—that squeezed Athens within and without (ἀνθρώπων τ' ἔνδον θνησκόντων καὶ γῆς ἔξω δῃουμένης, 2.54.1), and which seemed to confirm the words of the oracle: 'A Dorian war will come, and a plague with it' (ἥξει Δωριακὸς πόλεμος καὶ λοιμὸς ἅμ' αὐτῷ, 2.54.2).

But figurative overlaps run deeper, revealing how each is a foil to the other: the plague in this account is a war; the Peloponnesian war is a plague.[79] As Tim Rood has argued, the geographical movement of the plague down from Ethiopia picks up the movement of its symptoms down through the body; this not only turns attention upon the threat posed to Athens by the spatial reach of the war (as Rood suggests),[80] but turns the plague into a destructive force akin to an invading army. The plague sweeps into Athens with remarkable speed and violence; it is a force from abroad, from Ethiopia beyond Egypt, that 'descends' (κατέβη, 2.48.1) via Egypt, Libya and Persia. Indeed, Thucydides furthers the impression of hostile incursion with the explicit links that he draws with the events of the war. He assembles, at the start of

[78] Note the agonistic and military language in which authors of Hippocratic texts talk of fighting incurable diseases: von Staden (1990: 98-102), 'Disease and healer, contestants in the agon for incurability and health, respectively, thus both are living, active agents' (p. 99). The disease-war or disease-fight metaphor is thus not particular to Thucydides' description, but has particular effect in the context of his history of war.

[79] Michelakis (2019: 385-87) and Parry (1969: 113-16) are important here. Parry (1968: 114), for example, notes the poetic quality of ἐγκατασκῆψαι—used to describe the plague's (or something similar) possible earlier 'outbreaks'. His point that it is suggestive of a lightning bolt supports the broader analogy of the plague with divine interference.

[80] Rood (2012: 159). For a similar idea, see Mittelstadt (1968: 151), who found parallels between the progress of the disease through the body and the destruction of the Athenian empire.

his description, an analogous series of firsts: the plague's first appearances (ἡ νόσος πρῶτον ἤρξατο, 2.47.3), first origins (ἤρξατο δὲ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον, 2.48.1), first attacks (τὸ πρῶτον ἐν τῷ Πειραιεῖ ἥψατο τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 2.48.2), and the invasion of the same numbers of Spartan forces and her allies as 'first' assembled against Athens the previous year (ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἐσέβαλον ἐς τὴν Ἀττικήν, 2.47.2).

The plague is then given a life of its own: like the Peloponnesian military forces that 'cut down', 'slay', 'waste' the Attic land (ἐδήουν τὴν γῆν, 2.47.2; γῆς ἔξω δῃουμένης, 2.54.1), the plague is violent.[81] It 'dives into' Athens (ἐσέπεσε, 2.48.2),[82] lays physical touch on the men of the Piraeus (ἥψατο, 2.48.2), and 'squeezes' the Athenians (ἐπιέζοντο, 2.54.1). Its symptoms 'seize' (ἐλάμβανε, 2.49.2), 'overturn' (ἀνέστρεφέ, 2.49.3), 'fall upon' (ἐνέπιπτε, 2.49.4), 'burn' (ἐκάετο, 2.49.5), 'embrace' or 'oppress' (ξυνεχόμενοι, 2.49.5), 'attack' with a 'seizure' (τῶν γε ἀκρωτηρίων ἀντίληψις αὐτοῦ ἐπεσήμαινεν. κατέσκηπτε γὰρ ἐς αἰδοῖα… 2.49.7-8). Men are 'destroyed' and 'defeated' by it (διεφθείροντο, νικώμενοι, 2.51.5). Indeed, the first victims of the plague, those in the Piraeus, initially believe the force that kills them *is* a military one, substituting one cloak and dagger aggressor, the Spartans (who, they think, have thrown poison into their cisterns), for another, the plague.[83] The plague's advent is sudden and furtive (ἐξαπιναίως ἐσέπεσε, 2.48.2; τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀπ' οὐδεμιᾶς προφάσεως, ἀλλ' ἐξαίφνης […] ἐλάμβανε, 2.49.2). So are its weapons, which pierce the men like arrows, transfixing them like the sickness that 'runs right through' the body of the

[81] War and injuring: Scarry (1985: 63-81). War and force: Weil (2005).
[82] On medical use of words in πιπτ- see Hornblower (1991: 481) on 3.82.2.
[83] On accusations of well poisoning in other times of plague: Tuchman (1978: 116).

Athenian diseased (διεξῄει, 2.49.7).[84] The Athenian plague has vitality, agency and ferocious strength.

Integral to the metaphorical power of Thucydides' imagery here is the cultural tradition through which he writes.[85] At least some Athenians (including Thucydides) must have recalled the plague of the *Iliad*, if not during the plague itself, then when considering it in retrospect.[86] As Parry observed, the language of the ambiguous oracle cited by Thucydides, 'A Dorian war will come, and a plague with it' (see page 295), calls to mind another war and plague that together ravaged another people cramped in temporary shelter (albeit a military camp, rather than pop-up huts and cabins): the Achaean camp in Homer's *Iliad* 1; in the words of Achilles, war and plague together/at once, will break the Achaeans (εἰ δὴ ὁμοῦ πόλεμός τε δαμᾷ καὶ λοιμὸς Ἀχαιούς, *Il.* 1.61).[87] Apollo, too descended from elsewhere (βῆ δὲ κατ' Οὐλύμποιο καρήνων, *Il.* 1.44) and shot his arrows from far off (ἕζετ' ἔπειτ' ἀπάνευθε νεῶν, μετὰ δ' ἰὸν ἧκε, *Il.* 1.48); echoes of his wrath (χωόμενος and χωομένοιο, *Il.* 1.44, 46), his stealth (ὃ δ' ἤϊε νυκτὶ ἐοικώς, *Il.* 1.47),[88] underscore the deadly force of the plague, which is seen only in the damage that it inflicts.[89] This damage, blisters and sores that 'flower' like war wounds upon the

[84] Apollo, plague and the 'arrows of pestilence': Crawfurd (1914: esp. ch. 1).
[85] See especially Gekrke (1994) on the porosity between history and myth (in the modern world as much as the ancient world), on myth as intentional history, and on the self-discovery and identity consolidation (as individuals, groups, nations, and so on) that the construction of history and creation of myths facilitates. These ideas sit behind much of the argument in this part of the chapter. See further Atkinson (2001: 35-45), who applies Charles Rosenberg's argument that epidemics have a 'dramaturgical form' (Rosenberg (1992: ch. 13) to Thucydides' account of the plague.
[86] Linking the birds and dogs of *History* 2.50 with the mules and dogs of *Il.* 1.50: Woodman (1988: 38).
[87] Parry (1969: 115). On connections between plague and war in the *Iliad*, see Blickman (1987).
[88] Michelakis (2019: 402) comments on the 'military stealth technology' of Apollo's plague archery.
[89] Though Apollo is audible even if not visible: his arrows rattle upon his shoulders (*Il.* 1.46).

diseased (φλυκταίναις μικραῖς καὶ ἕλκεσιν ἐξηνθηκός, *History* 2.49.5),[90] are infused with the affective (even erotic) imagery that Casey Dué has traced through epic, lament, love song and Aeschylus' *Persians*, with images of warriors cut down in their prime; the mass slaughter is loaded with savage beauty, horror, loss and grief.

These intimations of pain and grief might call to mind, in turn, the exemplary story of mourning group death: Niobe and the Niobids.[91] The angered archer-god lurks in the cultural background to Thucydides' plague as unassailable perpetrator of mass slaughter, not just in plague or war, but in divine nemesis against mortals. The Athenian plague annihilates everything together (πάντα ξυνῄρει, 2.51.3), like the wholesale slaughter of the Niobids, helpless and unprotected beneath the arrows of the gods. These, too, in the Iliadic tradition at least, were left unburied by their kin in a gory spectacle (*Il.* 24.610-12).

[90] Note further how the disease, like a flower and like the men that it slays, reaches 'full bloom' (ἀκμάζοι, 2.49.6). Though Page (1953: 107) argues that Thucydides uses the verb ἐξανθεῖν in a way 'more or less confined to medical writings', he acknowledges similar uses in fifth-century poetry. Parry (1969: 112) also links to the *Persians*.

[91] While the Niobids seem to have featured in multiple visual and verbal media—from the *Iliad* to Greek tragedy (Aesch. *Niobe*, Soph. *Niobe*), from pots to temple sculpture and the throne of Zeus at Olympia—the surviving evidence is fragmentary and uncertain. It has been argued by Dinsmoor (1939), for example, that the group of wounded Niobids found at the Gardens of Sallust in Rome might represent some of the lost south-pediment sculptures from the temple of Apollo at Bassae. If that temple was indeed built for Apollo in thanks for his help during a time of plague (as Pausanias suggests in *Description of Greece* 8.41.7-8), then the Niobids might have been associated not just with divine slaughter, but with plague. However, much of this is conjecture.

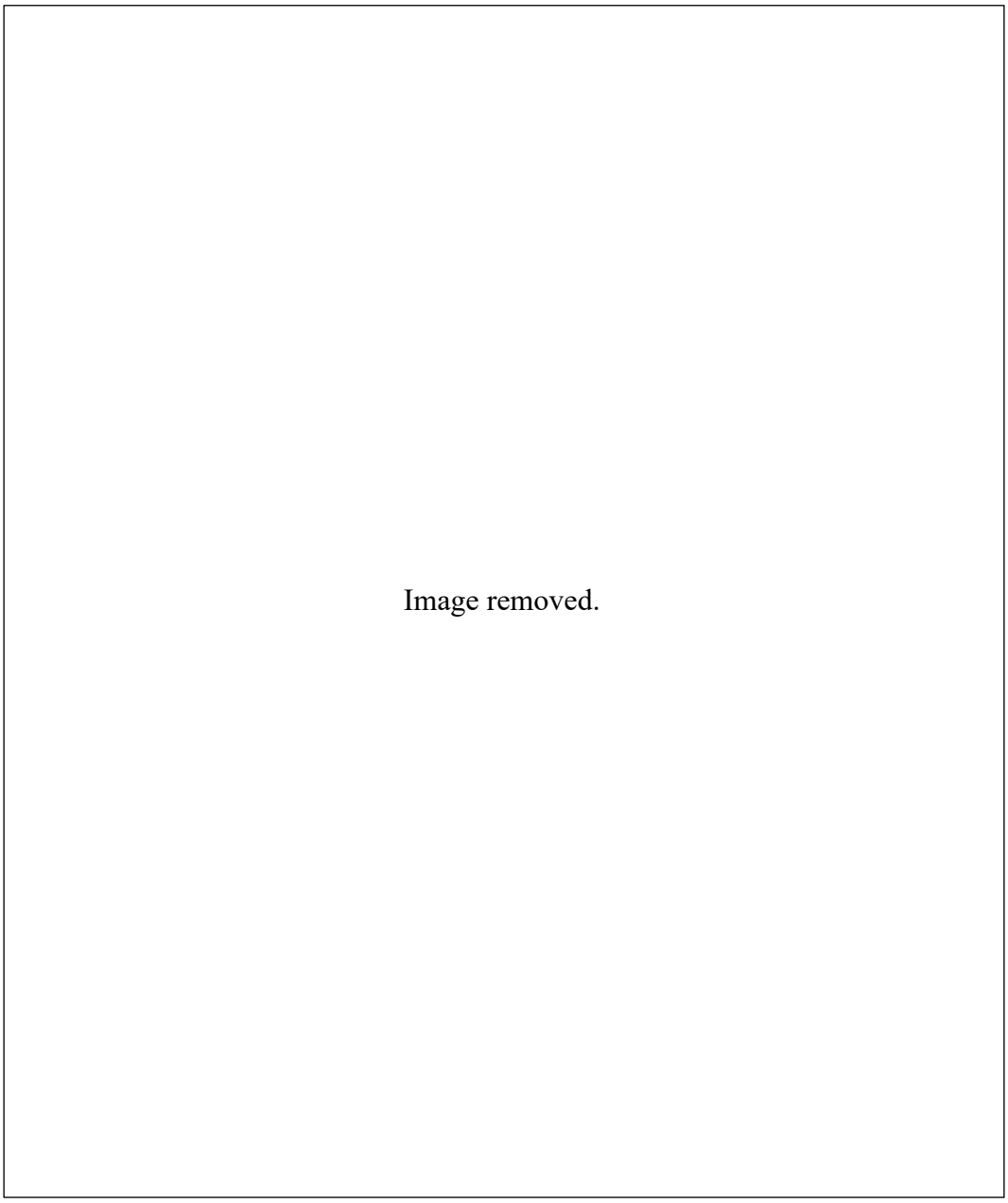


FIGURE 5.1

Niobid *krater* (exterior, one side).

Attic red-figure *krater*, attributed to the Niobid Painter. c. 460-450 BCE.

Height 54cm, Diameter 51.5cm.

Found in Orvieto.

Musée du Louvre, Paris: G 341.

Photo: © 1994 RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.

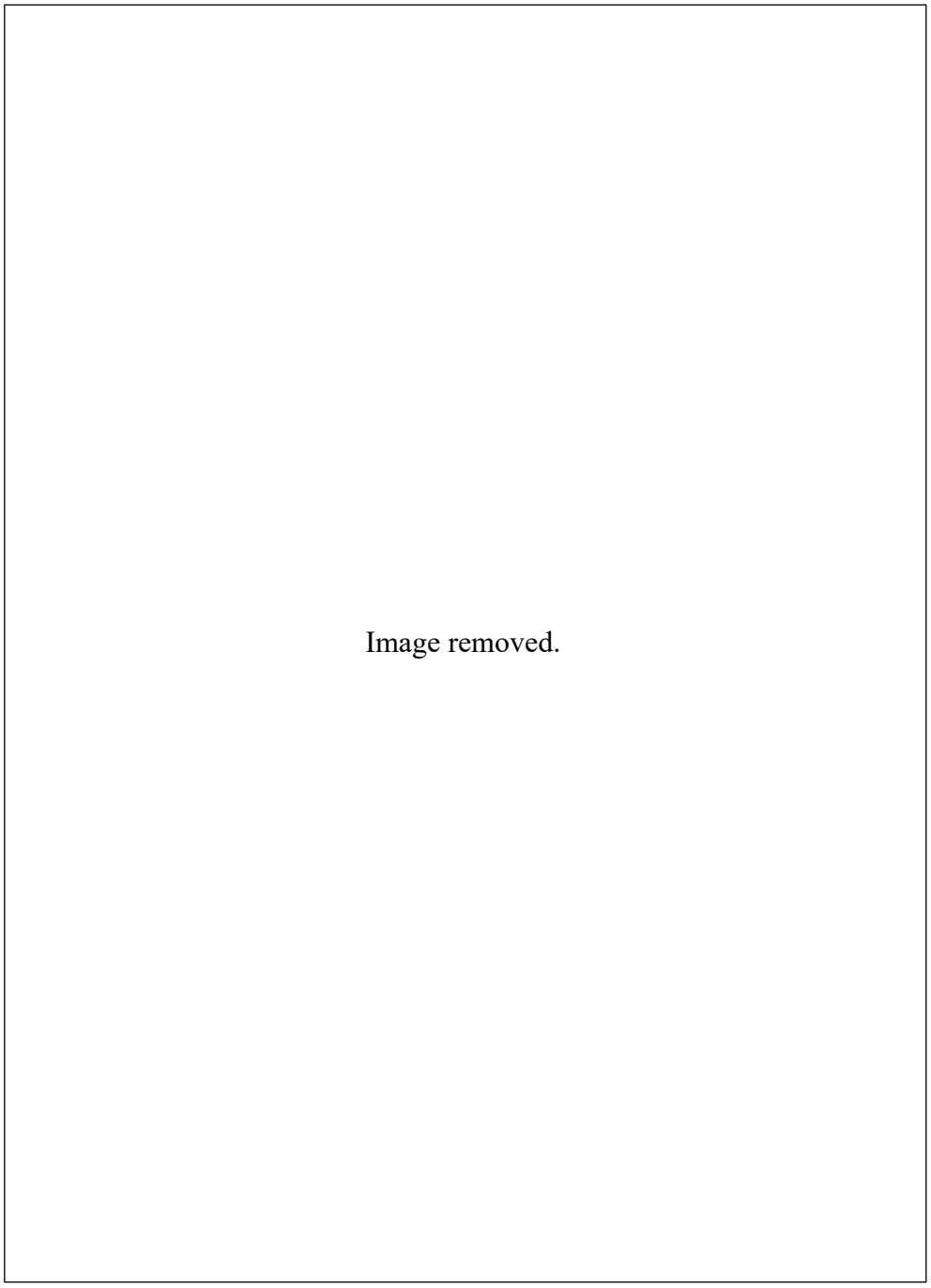


FIGURE 5.2

Niobid *amphora* (one side).

Attic black-figure *amphora*, attributed to the Tyrrhenian Group. c. 570-560 BCE.

Height 41.6cm, Diameter 24.7cm.

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg: 1960.1.

Photo: Museum website (public domain).

Moreover, a clinical attention to match Thucydides' own detailed account of the bodily symptoms of the plague can be observed in the visual tradition—on the Niobid krater, for example, where children's bodies are displayed with seemingly deliberate variety, their bodies twisting through 360 degrees, as a viewer's eyes move from left to right (FIGURE 5.1).[92] Even more than the Achaeans, the Niobids stand for vulnerability: defined by childhood and mortality, they are quintessential victims. This vulnerability is present in Thucydides' poetics: the Athenians 'were dying like livestock' (ὥσπερ τὰ πρόβατα ἔθνῃσκον, 2.51.4). Thucydides' Athenians die in simile, like cattle, flocks, herds, animals for the slaughter;[93] like the mules (οὐρῆας, *Il.* 1.50) on which Apollo first directs his arrows in the *Iliad*; like Niobids that fall prey to divine predators on an archaic black-figure amphora in Hamburg (FIGURE 5.2).[94] On this pot, the bodies of the Niobids form a central group in the shoulder panel framed by their divine aggressors, who trap the mortals within their field of vision; the divine slaughter is then paired with a scene in the lower portion of the bottom panels in which lions surround an antelope, producing a visual simile that emphasises the vulnerability of the victims and the inequity of the match. As in Thucydides' plague narrative, prominence is given to the overwhelming, all-encompassing power of death. The impression is of mass, thick-set death in groups, weak beneath a more powerful force. The helplessness of the Athenian people—men turned animals (in physical and moral frailty) before the violence of the

[92] *BAPD* 206954; Beazley (1925: 338.9); *ARV*[2] 601.22, 1661; *Para* 395; *Add*[2] 266. Perhaps this pot is also influenced by the development of medical approaches or else, together with the Hippocratic corpus, absorbs and contributes to growing interest in the human body as an object for study. Though note Craik (2001): the Thucydidean plague's progress accords with theories of bodily flux and fixation in some Hippocratic texts.
[93] Discussion of literal/metaphorical meaning here: Hornblower (1991: 324-25) on 2.51.4.
[94] *BAPD* 350268; *Para* 40; *Add*[2] 28. See further *BAPD* 350226 (fragmentary).

plague—takes on cosmic significance when set against the mythological backdrop, where divine arrows massacre men, children and beasts.[95]

Associations between war, plague, and death, drawn explicitly in the oracle cited by Thucydides and more suggestively in the poetic tradition, are numerous and carry multiple implications.[96] At a literal level, loss of manpower may have been one actual or perceived reason for Athens' weakness and eventual defeat in the war. More figuratively, the plague offers a foil for the events of Thucydides' *History* (and vice versa): the mass casualties in Sicily; the honour and burial of the fallen in Pericles' funeral speech. In a loose sense, echoes in word and concept communicate the macro, epic significance of both plague and war in the minds of the Athenians.[97]

More important within the context of this thesis is how Thucydides' poetics turn attention upon the epistemological parameters that define representation of and response to mass death. Parry touches upon this in his emphasis on Thucydides' representation of the plague as daimonic, irrational, incalculable, as a 'violent challenge to the Periclean attempt to exert some kind of rational control over the

[95] The cosmic significance of plague is also a theme in the tragic tradition, as in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, which is roughly contemporary with Thucydides' writing; see Crawfurd (1914: 22-23); Michelakis (2019: 387-88). On the plague in tragedy, see Mitchell-Boyask (2008).

[96] Connection between plague and war in Thucydides (two *paraloga*—phenomena beyond human reason): Parry (1969: 115-16); Allison (1983: 18) on parallels between war and plague and death as their 'common denominator'; Jouanna (2006: 198-99, 207-9). Thucydides writes himself into plague/war tradition (Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles): Woodman (1988: 32-33); Morgan (1994: 205-6). See further Bruzzone (2017) in note 47. These associations perfuse plague literature more extensively, for example in the writings of Early Modern England: Miller (2016: 161-81). Note, too, Alessandro Manzoni's representation of the outbreak of the 1630 plague in Milan (and more widely in Italy) in chapter 31 of *I Promessi Sposi* (1827), which begins, like Thucydides' account, with a feared invasion of German troops. Demont (1990: 154-55) explores the association in the literary tradition between civil war and plague, and suggests that Thucydides rewrites that relationship.

[97] Note Greenwood (2006: 7): Thucydidean references to Homer (explicit or implicit) assimilate the cultural authority of epic generally, not Homeric epic.

historical process'.[98] The daimonic power of the plague is, indeed, important. But so is Thucydides' poetic register and the cultural tradition with which he is in discourse. The combination of the two (echoes of Apollo; echoes of a visual-verbal mythological tradition) is provocative and cannot only be seen as a natural or accidental result of the historian's unconscious immersion within his own cultural paradigm.[99] Rather, the whole account is a cultural katabasis of sorts, akin to the geographical and biological 'katabasis' of the plague (κατέβη, 2.48.1; κατέβαινεν, 2.49.3):[100] it is a literary descent into an underworld inhabited by mass deaths—the war-plague of the *Iliad*; slaughters of Niobids, and so on.

This is suggested by the fact that the poetics of the plague narrative perform exactly the sort of history that Thucydides purports to reject.[101] Consider, first, his exclusion of the 'legendary' or 'fabulous' (τὸ μυθῶδες, 1.22.4) in his reflections upon the methodology and style that underpin his *History*: his account may bring listeners less pleasure, but it will offer a clear view.[102] Though the emphasis in his

[98] See Parry (1969: 115-16). See further Michelakis (2019: esp. 386) on Thucydides' plague's associations with daimonic and elemental forces, birds of prey and material objects.
[99] See especially Cornford (1907) on 'Thucydides Mythistoricus'.
[100] Page (1953: 104) observes that this verb is common in the Hippocratic corpus. It is, however, not an exclusively medical term. The descent of the plague is not literally a 'katabasis', but words such as κατέβη and κατέβαινεν might conceivably bring the more deathly associations of κατάβασις to mind.
[101] *pace* Flory (1990), who reads τὸ μυθῶδες as referring specifically to patriotic, idealistic anecdotes.
[102] Gomme (1945: vol. 1, 149) on 1.22.4 comments that μυθῶδες refers to a 'story-telling element' as opposed to mythology. Mythical elements in Thucydides, born of an Athenian conception of the world ('Thucydides Mythistoricus'): Cornford (1907). The relationship between myth and history in early Greece and the 'atmospheric saturation achieved by myth in the thoughtworld in which Herodotus and Thucydides were implicated': Cartledge (2002: 18-35, esp. 27). Thucydides' narrative legacy from Herodotus and Homer: Rengakos (2006a), (2006b). Note further White (1981) on the value of narrativity in history and representation of reality; Moles (1993) on the melding of fact and fiction in the genre of historiography. Complicating the differences between fictional and factual narratives: Genette (1990); Hornblower (1994). Pre-history of history in epic: Hartog (2000: esp. 394), 'Like the bard, the historian deals with memory, oblivion, and death'. Epic and tragic echoes in Thucydides: Joho (2017). Herodotus' influence upon Thucydides: Rood (1999). Thucydides' 'agonistic intertextuality': Corcella (2006: 56). Thucydides' dialogue with other works, 'both comprehend[ing] and challeng[ing]' genre: Marincola (1999). See further Ponchon (2017: pt. 1) on Thucydides' intellectual and generic debts (scientific, epic, tragic). But see Greenwood (2006:

plague account on observation of symptoms accords with his historiographical promise of something visually vivid, the stories and supremely pleasurable oral poetry through which he also writes complicate any sort of neat differentiation in register. Particularly perplexing is his treatment of the oracle at the conclusion of his account, where he comments (2.54.2-3):

> ἐν δὲ τῷ κακῷ οἷα εἰκὸς ἀνεμνήσθησαν καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ ἔπους, φάσκοντες οἱ πρεσβύτεροι πάλαι ᾄδεσθαι ‘ἥξει Δωριακὸς πόλεμος καὶ λοιμὸς ἅμ’ αὐτῷ.’ ἐγένετο μὲν οὖν ἔρις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μὴ λοιμὸν ὠνομάσθαι ἐν τῷ ἔπει ὑπὸ τῶν παλαιῶν, ἀλλὰ λιμόν, ἐνίκησε δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος εἰκότως λοιμὸν εἰρῆσθαι· οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς ἃ ἔπασχον τὴν μνήμην ἐποιοῦντο. ἢν δέ γε οἶμαί ποτε ἄλλος πόλεμος καταλάβῃ Δωρικὸς τοῦδε ὕστερος καὶ ξυμβῇ γενέσθαι λιμόν, κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς οὕτως ᾄσονται.
>
> And in the disaster, as is fitting, they remembered this oracle, the more senior among them asserting that of old it was sung: ‘a Dorian war will come and a plague with it’. So then a quarrel arose amongst the people, arguing that it was not ‘plague’ that was specified in the oracle by the ancients, but ‘famine’, but suitably the ‘plague’ reading prevailed given the situation. For people shaped their memory according to what they suffered. And, in fact, I think that if ever another Dorian war lays hold of Athens after this one and it so happens that there is a famine, people will chant the oracle as such, as appropriate.

This has been interpreted as a wry comment, at the conclusion of his account, upon the popular tendency to look to the gods, or to some larger explanation for suffering (whereas in his *History*, by contrast, divine explanations are noticeably absent).[103] The paragraph is also about memories of hexameter (τοῦδε τοῦ ἔπους), people’s readiness (‘as is appropriate in difficult times’) to account for their own suffering

7) on Thucydides’ ‘[strenuous suppression of] the fame and influence of these authors in his work’. Historians as ‘writing something at odds with the temper of the time’: Gabba (1981: 52). For the argument that Thucydides does not reject poetic embellishment so much as claim that his subject does not need it, and that his graphic, realistic accounts are an *alternative* to mythologised narrative: Woodman (1988: 7-9, 23-28).

[103] Marinatos (1981: 139), for example, argues that Thucydides’ attacks not oracles *per se*, but people’s interpretations of them. See further Dover (1988: 65-73), arguing for a lack of contempt in Thucydides’ discussion of the oracle in 2.54 and a change in his attitude towards oracles over the course of his life. Compare the ‘elimination of the supernatural’ as an ‘epistemologically acceptable empirical attitude’ in early Hippocratic treatises, discussed in Mansfeld (1980: esp. 378-81) (he finds roots for this change in the influence of early Presocratic natural philosophy). See further Lloyd (1987: 11-21) on attempts by the Hippocratic writers to demystify disease—a ‘rationalist takeover’.

by reference to stories from the past and, crucially, the creativity inherent in memory formation (or re-formation), a creativity underpinned by a desire to find pattern, meaning and consolation.[104] This could, again, be a critical commentary upon the flimsy foundations upon which popular explanations can hang: people's needs and expectations shape what they remember. Taken together with his rejection of 'a good story', it seems that Thucydides decries exactly the sort of engaging account and pervasive attitude that he has just produced in his own poetic response to the plague, a *muthos* of sorts.

We are thus confronted with a poetic account that is steeped in a cultural tradition of daimonic force and framed in terms that are critical of that very medium. One possibility is that Thucydides sets up a deliberately agonistic discourse.[105] He draws attention to how he has appropriated the poetic register and rewritten it with a crucial difference: the cultural echoes may be there, but the gods are not (except in popular interpretation).[106] But this does not do full justice to the coincidence of register and content. Why this register (and self-reflexive commentary) here? Is it, in some way, *fitting*? It is surely important that Thucydides is not overtly critical of the popular response to disaster.[107] Might the condescension that has been found in

[104] There is an interesting nexus between the creativity underpinning memory and its relationship to the present and 'virtual history', as discussed in Ferguson (1997).
[105] Though he has claimed not to compose his *History* as an agonistic feat (ἀγώνισμα) for listeners' instant gratification (τὸ παραχρῆμα) (1.22.4).
[106] On prose itself as a contest of authority, see Goldhill (2002: esp. 1-9). See further Demont (1990: 152-53), who points out that Thucydides has reversed cultural associations regarding the causal relationship between failure to bury or respect the dead and plague (as divine punishment), which might suggest that he reworks daimonic patterns in more realistic terms.
[107] Kallet (2013), at least, thinks Thucydides leaves the possibility of divine intervention open. See further note 103. *pace* Thomas (2006: 87) on Thucydides' '[implicit rejection of] any idea that the divine might play a part in either individual actions, or the larger patterns of history'. Though a certain superiority seems perceptible in the suggested distance between himself and οἱ ἄνθρωποι, it is important, and acknowledged in Thucydides, that the gods and oracles *do* have a part to play in social conceptualisation of disaster and 'the larger patterns of history'. Note evidence for significant fluctuation in religious activity and feeling during and after the plague: Mikalson (1984).

his references to the people's fitting willingness to fit oracular words to their situation have been sung in tune with scholarly expectations that a daimonic reading would *not* be fitting in his account?[108]

Thucydides was hyper-aware of register and methodology. For most of the *History* he sustains not just an account that is fairly free of descriptions of dying (considering that his topic is war), but one that eschews supernatural explanations.[109] In his plague account, however, he mingles an objective, clinical description of the plague with a more metaphorical, poetic register. Intentions aside, one idea that his combination suggests is that, for all their unsatisfactory methodological implications, 'fair' words are a fair response to mass death.[110] The result is that Thucydides' account can readily be situated within a wider existential discourse that often, for good reason, puts the gods at the centre, and can also be read through a more empirical lens. It is highly relevant, in fact, that Thucydides' account has not only spurred historians of medicine and disease to analyse and re-analyse the symptoms of the Athenian plague,[111] but has also inspired a more literary reception (including, notably, Lucretius' reworking at the conclusion of *de rerum natura*)[112] and so claimed a spot in canonical world literature of plague.[113]

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[108] Kallet (2013: 356) makes a similar point.
[109] See for example Dewald (2006) on the '"secular" common sense' that underpins Thucydides' (and Herodotus') history. See further Lane Fox (2020: 274, 279-80).
[110] Kitto (1966: 273) observed, 'of the passages of free description, a remarkable number—very remarkable in "a cold and scientific historian"—have to do with death and destruction'. See further Michelakis (2019), who argues that the linguistic and conceptual associations and cross-contaminations in plague narratives reflect and perform its real force. On the balance in Thucydides' *History* between tragic and rational conceptions of the world (and the affinity of this balance with Democritean theories), see Hussey (1985).
[111] See King and Brown (2015) on the medical reception history of Thucydides' plague description.
[112] Lucr. *de rerum natura* 6.1138-286. See, for example, Finnegan (1999: 31-35). There are further echoes in, for example, Giovanni Boccaccio's fourteenth-century account of the Black Death (and especially its impact on customs and morals) in his introduction to the Prima Giornata (First Day) of the *Decameron*. See further note 96.
[113] See Rusten (1989: 179), 'The scientific value of the description is less notable than its literary impact'. Emphasising 'plague's position within cultural memory': Cooke (2009: 4).

Thus, an uneasy impression that mass death might inherently invite an imaginative response coincides with the methodological reflections on exteriority and generality that I discussed earlier in this chapter. Indeed, perhaps this is one reason why there is not more emphasis on dying, especially mass dying, in Thucydides' *History*. Perhaps this flows not just from an interest in the bigger political picture, but also from a sense that mass death is difficult to treat in the methodological way deemed by Thucydides to be appropriate for the sort of history that he wants to write.[114]

DYING LIKE SHEEP: A CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I return to Thucydides' simile: the Athenians 'were dying like livestock' (ὥσπερ τὰ πρόβατα ἔθνησκον, 2.51.4). To some extent, this simile tends to collapse the distance between Thucydides' readers and the deaths that occurred in the plague by reframing the extraordinary death of multitudes in more familiar terms (at least, in terms that might have been more familiar to more of Thucydides' readers than readers today). The point, perhaps, is that lots of them died at once.[115] Or that they were vulnerable beneath a stronger force (man, god, plague). Or that they lost their identity in death, shifting from Athenian citizens to a nameless mass of animals. The simile invites movement from observation to reflection, to meditation on what death is and is like.

[114] The spectacular and the horrible: Sontag (2019: esp. 66) on the anxieties raised by photographs that depict suffering, 'The photograph gives mixed signals. Stop this, it urges. But it also exclaims, What a spectacle!' See further Greenwood (2006: ch. 2) on Thucydides, the theatre of war and the 'paradigmatic quality of Athenian drama' vis-à-vis the relationship between sight and insight. We might think in terms of Thucydides' uncomfortable position within a 'super-genre' of mass death representation; on ancient conceptions of super-genres, see Hutchinson (2013a).

[115] See Rusten (1989: 188) on 2.51.4, 'The point of the comparison lies in the more numerous fatalities associated with diseases of livestock'.

But the simile also reframes death in terms that draw attention to the epistemological challenges posed by existential thought. What do people know of the death of sheep? Surely the comparison makes these deaths more, not less, alien? (Does this simile, in fact, point towards the mystery that surrounds *all* death—of sheep or Athenians?) And how comparable are these deaths? The poetic register launches readers into an iterative series of literary comparisons: Thucydides' Athenians die like sheep, like Achaean mules, like Danaans, like Niobids, like wild prey, like flowers. Observation-based existential reflection is founded upon analogy, an imaginative, and artistic, mode of thought.[116] In this respect, the invitation to figurative thought that is made by Thucydides' use of a classic literary device—a device that is characteristic of Homer—turns attention back upon the imaginative process that underpins his more empirical approach to disease. Extrapolating a generalised account of disease is founded upon comparison, upon extracting the essential features that make one situation like another.[117] The simile speaks, then, to part two of this chapter, to the epistemological (and ethical) problems that surround generalising about disease or death.[118]

But the simile also speaks to part one. The invitation to poeticise, and mythologise, the Athenians when they die of the plague raises another epistemological problem

[116] Compare the distance that Kathleen Miller identifies in Samuel Pepys' account of the Great Plague: Miller (2016: 174). See further Barker (2004: 668) on *The Plague of Ashdod* and Poussin's creation of 'fictive distance between the spectator and the image'.
[117] Compare Arist. *Poet.* 1457b6-33 on the categories of metaphor, three of which involve notions of genus (γένος) and species (εἶδος). In *Rh.* 1406b20-26, he considers metaphor little different from a simile.
[118] Indeed, it seems that it was this combination in Thucydides (under the influence of Hippocratic medicine) of observation with psychology, with the 'unchanging rule which governs the relations between events', that Collingwood found so repugnant: 'In reading Thucydides I ask myself, What is the matter with the man, that he writes like that? I answer: he has a bad conscience. He is trying to justify himself for writing history at all by turning it into something that is not history.' See Collingwood (1946: 29-30).

at the heart of a history of mass death (in war or plague): to what extent does observation of another's predicament permit, or preclude, vicarious experience? This is a point that I discussed in chapter four (pages 225-26): what is at stake in seeing dying Athenians as sheep, or as subject matter for poetry? The relationship between art and suffering, disease and death is ethically problematic. But, to the extent that knowledge of death is predicated upon perceiving it happen, the relationship also has epistemological implications. Perhaps spectacle and poetry are integral to appreciation of the existential significance of dying Athenians—to seeing them as more than medical specimens.[119] In this respect, this comparison is not just a simile, and does not just compare dying Athenians to dying sheep; it calls to mind the cultural framework through and against which existential reflection might take place.

Thucydides wrote carefully and deliberately, and it seems likely that he made a choice to use this simile, to tap into a recognisably poetic register. In the immediate context of his plague account, and the wider context of his *History* (and, especially, his methodological and stylistic reflections), this choice has an impact akin to Socrates' adoption of a more imaginative register in his ekphrasis at the conclusion of Plato's *Phaedo*. Thucydides' enquiry, unlike Plato's, is not self-consciously philosophical (or, at least, not in the same way), and his immediate subject was not death (except insofar as a history of war is also a history of death). But his explicit engagement with the challenges surrounding movement from observation to

[119] See especially Connor (1985: 9-17), 'The political lessons and the utility of the *Histories*, in other words, derive not from Thucydides' explicit comments or implicit theorizing, but from the reader's own involvement in the work' (p. 11). See further Rood (1998: 8-9) on reasons to analyse Thucydides' text as a whole, rather than 'splintering his varied emotional, rhetorical and analytical registers'.

knowledge, and from the particular to the general, invites readers to reflect not just on the existential implications of a deadly plague that accompanies and is like a deadly war, but on the epistemological problems that frame that meditation. Indeed, an epistemological process is at the heart of his stated purpose (2.48.3):[120]

> ἐγὼ δὲ οἷόν τε ἐγίγνετο λέξω, καὶ ἀφ' ὧν ἄν τις σκοπῶν, εἴ ποτε καὶ αὖθις ἐπιπέσοι, μάλιστ' ἂν ἔχοι τι προειδὼς μὴ ἀγνοεῖν, ταῦτα δηλώσω.
>
> But I will say what sort of thing it became, and I will make details visible from which someone, on close inspection (if ever it even attacks again), might have a chance of not failing to recognise it, having seen it before…

Should the plague occur again, Thucydides hopes that double observation of the particulars he describes and the particulars that re-surface might give his readers some hope of knowing it for what it is.[121] He thus offers his account as a simile of sorts, a mirror, or potential mirror, in which his audience might observe and come to recognise their own deaths.[122]

[120] The construction here is characteristically complex. For the suggestion that the complexity of Thucydides' expression 'replicates the intractability of historical experience', see Connor (1985: 7-8).

[121] See Nicolai (2009: 389-93) for an overview of the scholarly reception of Thucydides' words.

[122] The words of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1908: 25) on reception as, inevitably, a contamination of history, take on life here, 'We know that ghosts cannot speak until they have drunk blood; and the spirits which we evoke demand the blood of our hearts. We give it to them gladly; but if they then abide our question, something from us has entered into them; something alien, that must be cast out, cast out in the name of truth!' See further de Romilly (2005: 15) on Thucydides' goal in his *History*; Bakker (2006: esp. 119) on the monument and 'eternal process' of Thucydides' text, a past that intrudes into the present of his future readers. Compare Lendle (1990: 235, 242), who proposes a more modest reading of Thucydides' goal for his text as of intellectual interest to his contemporary readers for their lifespan (rather than for momentary pleasure). Perhaps a middle ground can be found in a simple opposition between 'lasting' (for any reader) versus 'momentary'.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the case studies in this thesis build a picture of culturally-mediated encounters with death in classical Athens. Existential reflection was not confined to a group of elite thinkers and to the texts that they produced, texts that were self-consciously philosophical or that made death the explicit focus of enquiry. Reflections on death were also generated by idiosyncratic interactions between individuals and visual or verbal media in a variety of contexts across Athens, and by dialogues between those encounters. Existential meditation was crystallised not just in contemplation beside the grave, or during a philosophical discussion on the immortality of the soul, but in the theatre, in the symposium, on the Acropolis, in response to Thucydides' *History*, and so on. In this respect, both what Plato said in the *Phaedo* and how he said it, and the reflections that his text generated, engaged with at least a century of interest in an existential problem and with a cultural phenomenon of grappling with that problem through daily encounters.[1]

The picture is also one of epistemological anxiety: visual and verbal media generated and shaped encounters with death, and also generated and shaped epistemological reflections on the imaginative nature of those encounters—upon the immediate and wider cultural frameworks within which such imaginative processes took place. In diverse ways, texts and material culture of classical Athens—literary philosophy, painted pots, tragic drama, temple sculpture,

[1] The emphasis in Lakoff and Johnson (2003) on the lived experiences that underpin abstract thought is relevant here, as is recent work on object-mediated meditation: see pages 32-33.

historiography of war and disease—drew attention to the epistemological challenges of exteriority and generality that beset existential meditation.

The mystery of death provides one backdrop to this picture. Indeed, the starting premise of this thesis was that death is a mystery: no one knows what death is and what it is like to die. But this picture can also be set within a bigger one: a concentration of interest in the relationship between perception and experience, the particular and general, the knowable and unknowable. This more extensive preoccupation was integral to my fifth chapter, for example, where meditations upon the epistemological problems that define existential reflection crystallised in and through Thucydides' description of epidemic disease and historiographical methodologies, and the problems of exteriority and generality that they raise. That multi-layered discourse can then itself be contextualised, set within and against an intellectual climate that included Hippocratic studies and approaches, with their emphasis upon the general principles that might be extrapolated from and mapped back onto observation of symptoms. Indeed, interest in the interface between perceptibility and knowability, and between the particular and general, can be traced through media not studied here, and in relation to subjects other than death: consider the law court, where what was actually seen and imagined to be seen during a speech was influential upon the formation of a concept of justice in general and the just decision in particular by jurymen, individually and as a collective.[2] Though the discipline has rightly become more cautious about articulating the intellectual climate of fifth-century Athens as a 'revolution', 'evolution', or 'birth'

[2] Explored in Westwood (Forthcoming).

in any sort of teleological or instantaneous sense, it is widely accepted that the classical period reveals acute interest in knowledge formation.

But classical Athens, broadly conceived, was not just a period of intense intellectual activity; it was also one of remarkable cultural activity. This combination is significant; indeed, a core point of this thesis is that the two went hand in hand. Classical Athens saw the emergence and popularity of new forms of verbal and visual media such as prose, drama and large-scale bronze sculpture (new in this period to Athens, at least), as well as developments in the style and subject matter of existing media such as lyric poetry, painted pottery, and sculpted stone.[3] New styles across the Greek world are characterised by drama, immediacy, impact, the impression of inner life: the Dying Warrior on the east pediment of the temple of Aphaia on Aigina intrudes into the space of viewers; his muscles and veins are visible; his body is responsive; his face has turned away from the viewer in apparent contemplation of his situation; he is shockingly present and shockingly realistic (FIGURE 6.1).[4] This is, as Elena Walter-Karydi puts it, the 'bewusste Tod', the 'conscious death', and suggests an interest in embodied life and experience (including of death) that is mediated by changes in sculptural style, such as the advent of contrapposto.[5] Theatre, too, brings mythical characters to life and dramatises their awareness of death: this is not an epic tale from the past, but 'a (significant) day in the life of Oedipus', or Antigone, or Alcestis. Plato's dialogues unfurl discussions between historical figures in and around Athens.

[3] For a broad overview of changes in thinking, technique and politics in the fifth century BCE, not just in Athens, but across the Greek world, see Lane Fox (2020: 1-6).
[4] See Neer and Kurke (2019: 70, fig. 2.23).
[5] Walter-Karydi (2015: esp. 127-34, 144-50). See page 155.

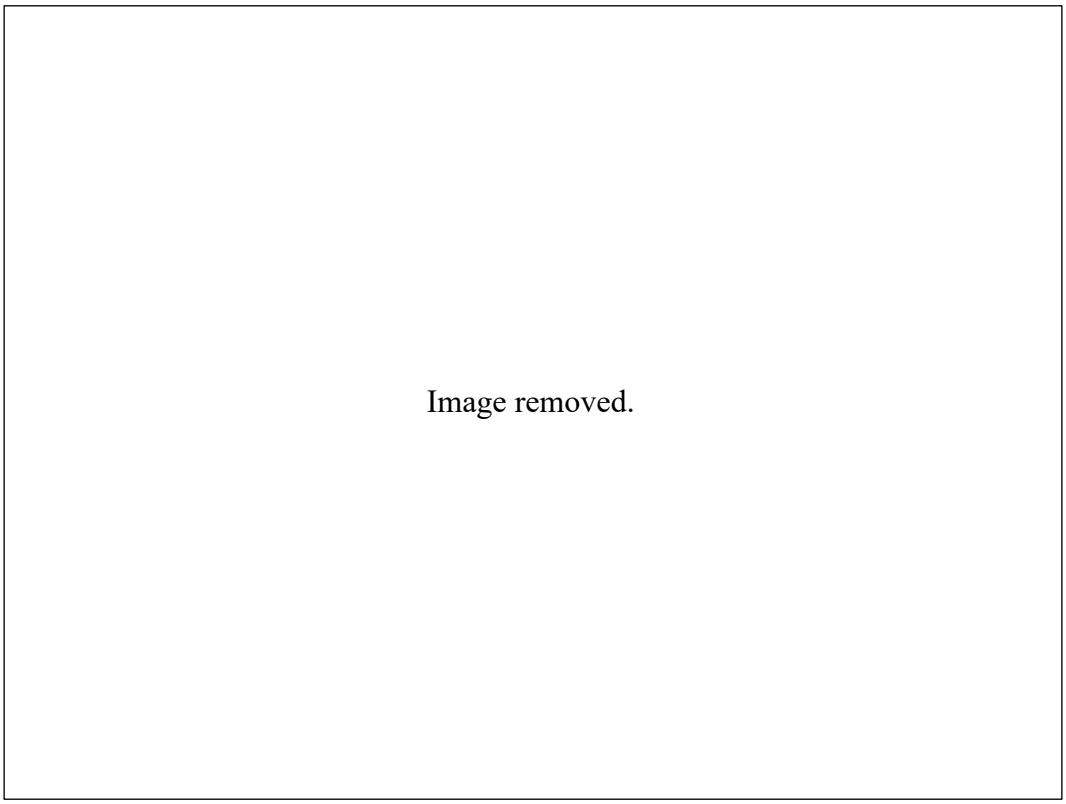


FIGURE 6.1

Dying Warrior, from the east pediment of the temple of Aphaia at Aigina (left corner). c. 490-480 BCE. Length 178cm.

Glyptothek Museum, Munich: 85.

Photo: Wikimedia.

But, as Jaś Elsner has argued, it is also possible to tell a different story by considering not just what was gained by new forms in fifth-century Athens, but what was lost (or less emphasised).[6] The changes that contribute to a heightened impression of lived experience (in that bodies appear to exist in, and to interact with, a virtual world) give sculpted, performed, painted, scripted figures and scenes an interiority that excludes the actual beholder. Viewers of the Dying Warrior on

[6] Elsner (2006).

the east pediment (by contrast with the one on the west) are still emotionally, sensorily, ethically affected, but their relationship with the 'dying' statue is also, in one important way, less direct: they are no longer invited to meet its gaze (FIGURES 6.1 AND 6.2).[7]

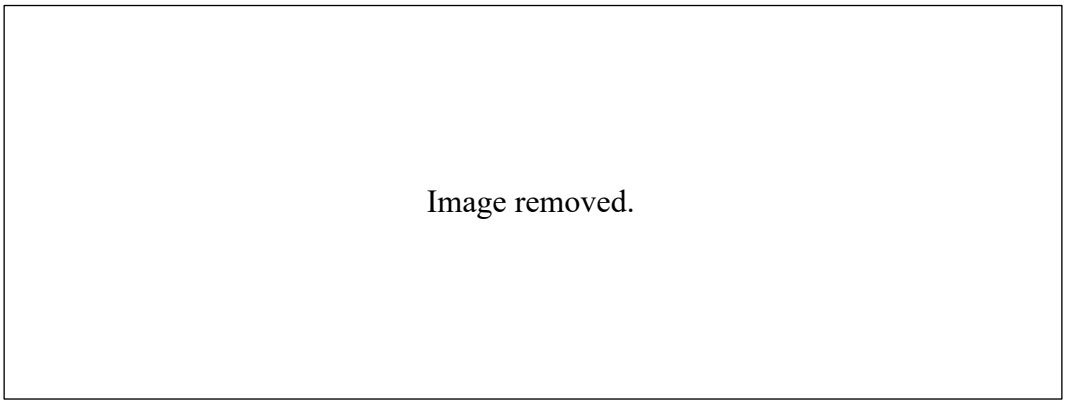


FIGURE 6.2

Dying Warrior, from the west pediment of the temple of Aphaia at Aigina (right corner). c. 500-480 BCE. Life size.

Glyptothek Museum, Munich: 79.

Photo: Wikimedia.

Their relationship is thus defined by a particular sort of exteriority, by their situation as observers ('voyeurs') of that body being in a world, rather than as acknowledged

[7] The idea that viewers might have been invited to meet the frontal stare of a pediment statue is problematic, since the height of the pediment excludes any real possibility of meeting a gaze. Nevertheless, we can speak of the different relationships that the two warriors forge with the world of actual viewers; this would have been noticeable even from below. Indeed, the point need not be confined to the gaze; the whole body of the west warrior is frontally arranged, in contrast to that of the east warrior, which appears absorbed in its existential and physical situation without regard for viewers. Osborne (2000: esp. 230-35) emphasises that pediments *in general* are confrontational spaces. See further Elsner (2006: 77). See, in contrast, Stewart (1997: 66-67) on how a *kouros* 'simply ignores you' and 'repels any direct advance'. See further note 49 on page 226.

participants in that world.[8] We might compare efforts in Greek painting to show scenes realistically from the perspective of viewers by foreshortening limbs, as in Euphronios' depiction of Sarpedon's receding left leg on the red-figure calyx-krater in the Muzeo Nazionale Cerite (see FIGURE 4.6, in chapter four).[9] The same details that make Sarpedon's body look lifelike simultaneously define him as an object of observation.[10] Indeed, this pot has been dated to the second half of the sixth century, demonstrating that stylistic choices, and the epistemological reflections that they raise, are not confined to a specific moment or place in time. But the point need not be that this is all new and different for all media at once and in the same way;[11] rather, the exteriority that is built into several forms that *are* new in the fifth century (notable here are sculpture, drama, and Plato's dialogues, and also historiography and writings within the Hippocratic corpus) is an important part of the picture here (and might, in fact, draw closer attention to an exteriority that has long existed in other forms). It would have theoretically been possible to combine contrapposto with a direct interaction with the viewer: one can imagine a version of the Dying Warrior on the east pediment that looked outwards. Catching someone's eye (real or virtual) is existentially significant,[12] and much of the new visual and verbal media of the classical period does not do it.[13] When it does, the implications can

[8] For language of voyeurism, see Elsner (2006). See Stewart (2008: 38-44) on the perceptual approach in Greek painting and 'the theatre of the real'.
[9] *BAPD* 187.
[10] I am grateful here to Hugo Shakeshaft, who shared his ideas on foreshortening and lifelikeness (currently unpublished) with me in conversation. See further Shakeshaft (2022: 30-31, 35).
[11] As Robin Osborne recently observed, painted figures on pots invited vicarious investment long before the fifth century (and 'real life' subject matter on fifth-century pots seems to invite *less* imaginative engagement): note 162 on page 136. Others have complicated any sense of sudden change and questioned Athenocentric explanations for the so-called 'Greek Revolution' in art: see, for example, Adornato (2019); Slawisch (2019). See further Vout (2014) on key trends in scholarship on the 'Greek Revolution'.
[12] See note 9 on page 80 for work on the existential significance of the frontal gaze.
[13] Some, of course, does, including parts of tragedy. The picture is not a simple one. But my point is that form matters, and several forms in the classical period seem to be in tune with intellectual interest in observation.

seem deliberately, ostentatiously provocative. Consider the curatorial attention to different modes of interaction and existence in the world on the Ilissos stele, dated to roughly 340 BCE (FIGURE 6.3): the contrast of the boy's absorption in grief, curled inwards upon himself; the old man's focus, in profile, upon the body of the young man; the young man's arresting gaze outwards towards viewers. The young man is like a *kouros*, but where viewers used to interact with one sculpted frontal gaze, they now encounter a community, like their own, in which others attempt and fail to do the same. This is not so much a representation of 'conscious death' as a representation of conscious reflection upon death from the outside, a sculpted drama of existential situations.

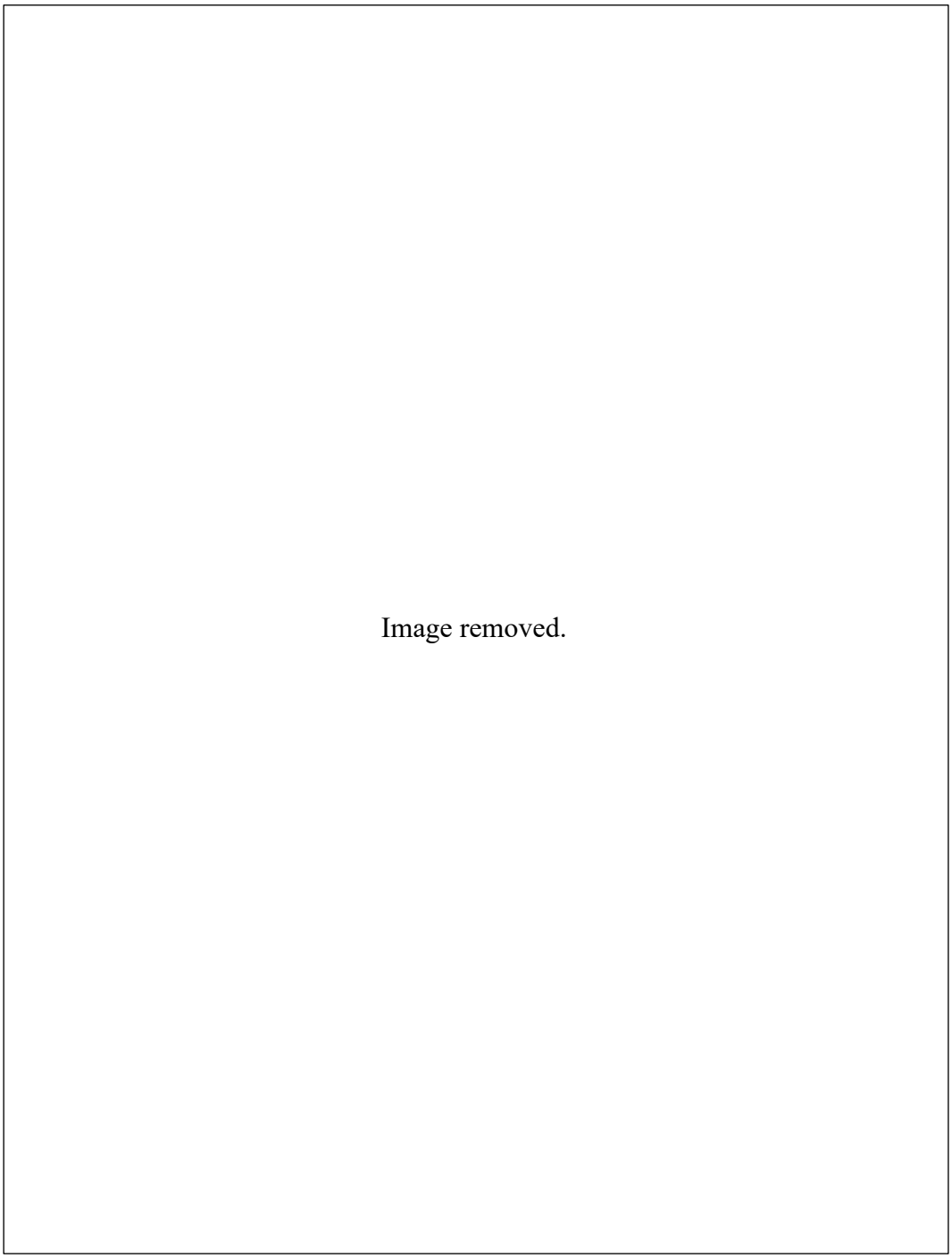


FIGURE 6.3

Ilissos Stele. c. 340-330 BCE. Height 168cm, Width 107cm.

Found in the Ilissos River, Athens.

National Archaeological Museum, Athens: 869.

Photo: Wikimedia / Aleksandr Zykov.

The cultural construction of situations in which Athenians encounter another's life (and death) as observers is existentially, and epistemologically, remarkable. After all, the exteriority involved in this mimics what it is like to encounter someone else in the real world. One point that is raised by my discussions of Plato's Phaedo's 'death of Socrates' and of the scenes on *lekythoi*, is that a high degree of *enargeia* in a description, or a painted scene that closely mirrors the daily lives of its Athenian handlers, might, in the very act of closing the distance between real and artificial worlds, put pressure upon the exteriority that remains. Take this principle to extremes, and one implication is that seeing real Socrates, not just Plato's *Phaedo*'s Socrates, gets us no closer to knowing what it is like to be Socrates (and to die as Socrates). The closer one gets to virtual reality, the more is at stake for reality. This has a particular resonance when considered through the lens of death, because the stakes are so high: the possibility that perception of another's death (in real life or art) might offer vicarious experience of not just their death, but death in general, and so one's own, is tantalising; this is one of the most important ways in which anyone might come to know the mystery of death. But the principle is more extensively applicable to existence.

In this sense, we can talk, at a high level, of an intense phenomenon of culturally-mediated existential and epistemological reflection in classical Athens.[14] Indeed, this dovetails (or is, at least, not incompatible with) different strands of scholarship that have variously emphasised intellectual developments in the classical period (including the ongoing development of scientific and rational thought);[15] a

[14] See further pages 154-56; the contributions in Clifford and Buxton (Forthcoming b) on culturally-mediated explorations of imaginative processes in classical Athens.
[15] See, for example, Lloyd (1987) and Longrigg (1993) on the emergence of scientific and rational thought among the Greeks. In the background here also sits Snell (1953: esp. 191-226). For a recent

longstanding but intensified interest in the twofold impact of art (as artefact and representation);[16] a delight in and anxiety about *mimesis*;[17] epistemological reflections on the status and use of images;[18] a shift in certain art forms towards the illusion of inner life, with an associated demand for vicarious adoption by the viewer of figures' perspectives;[19] a shift in the subject matter of painted pottery towards scenes that 'mirror' the daily life of Athenians;[20] an increasing interest in individual, personal experience of dying and death, including the journey to and continued existence in the world of the dead.[21] If a represented person is made to seem as if they really exist and experience death, or if they look like the viewer (or a version of them), then the epistemological stakes for existential reflection are raised. On the one hand, there is a tantalising possibility that this is what dying looks like; on the other hand, this is only what it *looks* like, not what it *is* like to die.

This puts a different spin on Plato's treatment of *mimesis* in the *Republic* and elsewhere. In addition to considering *mimesis* as a worse version of reality (one version further from the Forms), we might also consider the insights that *mimesis* offered Plato into the epistemological implications of an existential situation. This is not restricted to the observation-experience problem: Zacharoula Petraki's forthcoming chapter on Plato's use of sculptural language to articulate creative philosophical thought draws an link between his theory of participation in the

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discussion of ancient and modern concepts and language of the mind and the imagination, and especially on Bruno Snell's manifesto as less a history of the birth or evolution of consciousness so much as a history of consciousness of consciousness, see Clifford and Buxton (Forthcoming a).

[16] Neer (2002), (2010).

[17] On *mimesis* (and, especially, Plato's relationship with it), see note 30 on page 48.

[18] See note 133 on page 125, together with page 155. See further Vernant (1990) and, in response, Neer (2010: 14-19), adapted in Neer (2010).

[19] Elsner (2006).

[20] Osborne (2018: esp. 249-50); see note 162 on page 136.

[21] See especially Souvinou-Inwood (1981), (1987), (1995); Walter-Karydi (2015: 135-63). See further pages 135-36 and 154.

Forms and the new possibilities that the lost-wax bronze casting process offered for multiple instances of the same body;[22] it seems that Plato's thinking in relation to particularity and generality was mediated by the visual media of classical Athens as much as his thinking on the relationship between perception and knowledge.[23]

In opening up the conclusion of this thesis to consider its wider implications and, in particular, the historical setting within which the collective picture offered by its case studies might be positioned, this discussion has been necessarily suggestive and high level. It does, however, suggest several further avenues for research that might enrich the picture. In the first place, it indicates that there would be merit in pursuing more studies such as this with a focus on periods adjacent to the classical, to test out the idea that there is something distinctive about the intensity with which existential epistemological reflection is culturally mediated in this period.[24] For similar reasons, it would be interesting to compare studies drawn from periods and cultures from altogether different times and places (from Late Antiquity, for instance, to compare existential and epistemological discourse against the backdrop of Christianity) or to range beyond death into other conceptual areas such as justice, or virtue.[25] On the other hand, having taken the chapters together, it is also worth

[22] Petraki (Forthcoming).
[23] See further Andrea Nightingale's examination of the relationship between philosophical and cultural *theoria*, discussed in note 82 on page 184.
[24] Though encounters with death in the archaic period have been explored in, for example, Vermeule (1981) and Osborne (1988), there is room for a more epistemological approach.
[25] Compare, for example, D. Vance Smith's recent publication on the arts of dying in the Middle Ages: see note 61 on pages 33-34. Compare, too, Norbert Elias' suggestion that Romans could watch gladiators die because, 'No feeling of identity, it seems, united those spectators with these other people who, below in the bloody arena, were fighting for their lives': Elias (1985: 3). Pertinent to this thesis is Elias' argument that the loneliness of the dying is born, in part, of anxiety amongst the living that they might see their own death in another's, and so a 'repression' of death by way of withdrawal from the dying (pp. 9-12). For Elias, distance between the living and dying is not so much an inevitable result of existential and epistemological distance as a predictable result of anxiety that there is, in reality, no distance; he concluded, 'Death hides no secret' (p. 67).

thinking about the value that might be added by going in the opposite direction, by drilling down into diversity and idiosyncrasy within the classical period. Other media could have been included in this thesis and would have had their own story to tell: funerary monuments and inscriptions,[26] for instance, or comedy and rhetoric.[27] Moreover, this thesis has little to say about where social and political factors fit in the picture. For example, most of the figures that die in these chapters are men, which need not have been the case; a different version of this thesis might have included the deaths of Alcestis, Penthesilea, and Hegeso. A comparative study structured around a diversity of identities and situations might turn attention more closely not just upon how social and cultural norms surrounding gender or ethnicity might mediate existential reflection, but also upon the extent to which particularity, and similarity, of person makes a difference.

[26] There has been recent work (from a thanatological perspective) on the imagery on stelai: see Walter-Karydi (2015); Arrington (2018); Squire (2018b); Estrin (2018). But the corpus is large and there is room for a different slant.

[27] Aristophanes' *Frogs*, for example, as a confessedly imaginative foray into the world of the dead, might comprise a productive study, particularly because of the lens it provides onto mystery cult—another medium through which classical Athenians might encounter death (and, specifically, death as something mysterious).

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