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The archaeology of “celebrities” in the Greek and Roman worlds¹

Abstract

The debate about the identification of the house of Augustus on the Palatine hill or the controversy surrounding the occupant of Tomb 2 at Vergina or the recently excavated funerary complex at Amphipolis offer more than sufficient evidence for a public fascination with important historical personalities. Yet, at the same time, disciplinary trends in archaeology have sought to emancipate the material record from historicizing narratives and to occlude or decentre the knowing subject. The archaeology of the individual has become, at best, a quaint, antiquarian pursuit and, at worst, a celebration of neo-conservative ideology. This article will consider a series of case-studies from the ancient Greek and Roman worlds with the aim of illuminating the viability – and desirability – of practicing an archaeology of famous individuals.

Unearthing celebrities

To appreciate the impact that the archaeology of ancient celebrities can exercise on the popular imagination, one has only to consider the extraordinary events that accompanied the excavation, between 2012 and 2014, of the monumental funerary complex at Kasta hill, near the ancient city of Amphipolis in northern Greece.² Amidst a blaze of publicity, including daily news conferences, online discussions and blogs, and a high profile visit from the then prime minister, speculation ran rife as to the identity of the occupant of the tomb: among the most popular candidates were Alexander the Great’s Baktrian wife, Roxane; his posthumous son, Alexander IV; his mother, Olympias; his trusted companion, Hephaisteion; or even Alexander himself – despite the unanimous source tradition that located the Macedonian king’s final

¹ An earlier version of this article was delivered as the L’Orange Lecture at the Norwegian Institute in Rome on November 2, 2017. I am grateful to the Director, Dr Christopher Prescott, for his kind invitation and to all those who participated in the lecture and ensuing discussion.

² For the excavation reports, see “Archaeology in Greece Online:” <http://www.chronique.efa.gr/index.php/fiches/-voir/3073/>; <http://www.chronique.efa.gr/index.php/fiches/voir/4750/>. For the “lion monument,” which was discovered in the last century on the banks of the river Strymon and which was initially thought to have surmounted the tomb, see Broneer 1941.

resting place in Alexandria.³ But, when, at the end of 2014, it emerged that the skeletal remains belonged not to one, but five, individuals – a woman in her sixties, a newborn child, two men aged 35 to 45, and a cremated adult – and after one of the original excavators had begun to express doubts concerning the geology and chronology of the monument, public (and governmental) interest suddenly dissipated.⁴

As both Yannis Hamilakis and Dimitris Plantzos have pointed out, the interpretations of the Kasta burials – like the example of Vergina, another Macedonian site which we will consider in more detail below – are enmeshed within a highly sensitive political discourse concerning contested claims over the territory, and even the name, of Macedonia and the fundamental Hellenicity of its ancient occupants.⁵ But the public appetite for unearthing famous individuals from the past is hardly limited to Greece. One thinks of the location of the presumed remains of King Richard III in 2012 under the Leicester City Council car park and his re-interment, three years later, in the city's cathedral. In Rome, the cases that immediately spring to mind are the supposed burial of the apostle Peter in the Vatican, beneath the basilica that bears his name, or Pope Benedict XVI's announcement, in 2009, that the remains in a sarcophagus beneath the high altar of San Paolo Fuori Le Mura were those of St Paul. The dispute concerning the identification of the Caracalla House on the Palatine hill as the residence of the emperor Augustus may have been conducted less publicly but considerable media attention was devoted to Andrea Carandini's claims that he had uncovered, first, the fortification wall that Romulus had constructed around the Palatine, then the royal residence of Rome's first king, and finally the Lupercal – the cave where Romulus and Remus were supposedly reared by a she-wolf. Perhaps it is the illusory familiarity of famous individuals that makes them so attractive to the public. Yet this popular fascination runs counter to what is, among many archaeologists today, a thinly veiled contempt for the study of individuals in history.⁶ Indeed, Julian Thomas has even argued that “to impose the concept of the individual on the distant past is a dangerous and potentially narcissistic exercise.”⁷ The reasons for this antipathy to the individual are largely connected to the intellectual trajectories that the fields of history and archaeology have pursued in recent decades.

The demise of the individual

To take history first, the doctrine of what we would now call methodological individualism had already come under attack, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, from the sort of historical materialism associated with the name of Marx. It was eroded further with the focus on social and economic history that characterized the *Annales* school in France – and especially the second generation of *Annalistes*. In his magisterial *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, for example, Fernand Braudel distinguished between the freedom of social and economic units and the freedom of individuals, and described the Spanish monarch's lack of agency at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571: “What degree of freedom was possessed by Philip II, or by Don John of Austria as he rode at anchor among

³ Tsakiroglou 2015; Hamilakis 2016, 258; Plantzos 2017, 66.

⁴ Myrtsioti 2015; Plantzos 2017, 67.

⁵ Hamilakis 2013; 2016, 240–249; Plantzos 2017. Cf. Hall 2014, 103–104.

⁶ As noted in Meskell 1999, 9.

⁷ Thomas 2004, 147.

his ships, allies and troops?"⁸ In the Anglophone world, while the rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s initially seemed to offer the prospect of rescuing the "subaltern" voice from oblivion, its commitment to structural constraints and social forces dodged questions such as agency and experience.⁹ Now, it is true that the ripples from these currents of thought were slow to reach ancient historians and they were never pervasive, but there can be little doubt that the social and economic approaches to the past that were fostered by Moses Finley left an indelible mark on the field. As Finley put it, "If...one believes it to be a misjudgement of social behaviour to seek the mainsprings in the personalities and decisions of political and military elites, then the alternative analyses and explanations of some contemporary historians represent progress."¹⁰

Many archaeological theorists had already been privileging social groups over individuals – but for different reasons. The realization that the material traces of the past were sparse, partial, and incomplete encouraged practitioners to work on a larger scale, observing recurrent regularities across large swathes of time and space. One thinks, for example, of Gordon Childe's definition of an archaeological culture as "a plurality of well-defined diagnostic types that are repeatedly and exclusively associated with one another."¹¹ Such a conception of the archaeological record left little room for individual agency.¹² But, just at the very moment when many historians were turning to social approaches, a new wave of archaeological theory – dubbed processualism in the United Kingdom and New Archaeology in the United States – rejected historicizing approaches to the past and aligned itself with the social sciences, whose concentration on collectives, rather than individuals, can probably be traced back to Durkheim.¹³ Drawing on approaches from cultural ecology, New Archaeologists tended to view cultures as passive and adaptive responses to the environment, which generated predictable and normative patterns of human behavior, with little scope for individual agency.¹⁴ Even in the more idealist models of culture that were proposed by critical theorists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, or Michel Foucault, human subjects are typically held hostage by symbolic structures of signification or the operations of power.¹⁵

In the 1980s and 1990s, the so-called post-processual school of archaeology reacted against the doctrines of New Archaeology by turning back to history, championing the practice of contextual analysis, and arguing for the restoration of agency to archaeological interpretations.¹⁶ Yet, as John Barrett has argued, "[a] concern with agency...neither marks a return to the individual in history, nor a return to methodological individualism."¹⁷ First, by appealing to Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration or Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*, many archaeological theorists argue that agency is mediated by practice, which is both constrained by – and generative of – material and symbolic structures.¹⁸ Second, the

⁸ Braudel 1972, 1243; see Last 1995, 141-142.

⁹ Sewell 2005, 40.

¹⁰ Finley 1985, 5.

¹¹ Childe 1956, 123.

¹² Barrett 2001, 142-144.

¹³ Thomas 2008, 27.

¹⁴ Trigger 1989, 294-312.

¹⁵ Knapp, van Dommelen 2008, 21.

¹⁶ Hodder 1991 constitutes, in some sense, the "manifesto" for this new theoretical movement.

¹⁷ Barrett 2001, 149.

¹⁸ Giddens 1984; Bourdieu 1977. See Dietler, Herbich 1998; Barrett 2001, 148-155.

recent turn to notions of materiality – be it Igor Kopytoff’s cultural biography of things or Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory – might suggest that not all agents need be human.¹⁹ In fact, a lingering mistrust of the individual remains in much of the writings of archaeological theorists. Thomas’ critique, cited above, derives from his contention that the concept of the individual, seen as a rational, autonomous, and knowledgeable agent, is a post-Cartesian creation of western modernity and that its imposition on the past is both anachronistic and ethnocentric.²⁰ In a similar vein, Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley have written that “[t]he free, autonomous subject going around conferring meaning and significance at will is also an ideological component of capitalist social relations.”²¹ In their view,

“It does not seem to be at all theoretically acceptable to pursue a view of the human subject as endowed with specific capacities and attributes, as the source of social relations, font of meaning, knowledge and action. We should insist, therefore, on the logical priority of the social and structuring of social relations in accounting for all social practices including material culture production.”²²

Rescuing the individual

Bernard Knapp and Peter van Dommelen have taken exception to this complete occlusion of the individual in archaeology. Following Lynn Meskell, they argue that the terms “individual” and “individualism” should not be confused. While the latter, which involves concepts of selfhood, may indeed be the product of a very specific historical context, archaeologists have employed the concept of the individual more widely to indicate, for example, the objects of physical anthropological analysis, the creators of works of art and craft products, and those personages represented iconographically or textually, as well as historically known individuals such as Sumerian kings, Egyptian villagers, Greek philosophers, or Roman satirists.²³ In response, Thomas has maintained that a Sumerian king cannot be assumed to be an individual “simply because he had a specific name and a particular body.”²⁴

It is no secret that the majority of contributions to archaeological theory have been made by students of Mesoamerican archaeology or European prehistory, who barely ever mention classical archaeology.²⁵ The omission is significant because one thing that distinguishes much of the archaeology of the Greek, Roman, Near Eastern, and Egyptian worlds from other archaeological fields is the existence of contemporary textual documentation – something that should be a cause for celebration among classical archaeologists rather than a source of embarrassment, as inexplicably often seems to be the case. Almudena Hernando has suggested

¹⁹ Kopytoff 1986; Latour 2005.

²⁰ Thomas 2004, 119-148. Cf. Johnson 2010, 87: “...this is no excuse for taking the modern western ‘cult of the individual’ as self-evident, or true for all times and all places”.

²¹ Shanks, Tilley 1987, 77. Cf. Walsh 1995, 137, who argues that a focus on the individual is an “uncritical acceptance of Neo-Conservative ideology.”

²² Shanks, Tilley 1987, 97.

²³ Knapp, van Dommelen 2008, 18-19; cf. Meskell 1999, 9-10, 34-35.

²⁴ Thomas 2008, 27.

²⁵ Snodgrass 1985, 32-33 notes that, in criticisms the New Archaeologists made of “traditional archaeology”, Classical Archaeology was similarly ignored.

that the transition from pre- and proto-historical “relational identities” to modern “individualized identities” is connected to the distinction between oral and literate societies,²⁶ but, even if the strict dichotomy between orality and literacy were valid (which it is not), the literate cultures of the ancient Mediterranean upset so tidy a schema. The written word gives life to a multitude of individuals – not only etically, in the sense of catalogues of third-party actors, but also emically, in the individuals who submitted petitions in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the sculptors and vase-painters who signed their products, or the countless men, women, children, resident aliens, freedman, and even slaves who are commemorated on their tombstones.

We can, I think, agree that the modern western, neoliberal conception of the individual is unlikely to have existed in antiquity. If notions of personhood are produced and performed through broader networks of relationships, then they will vary according to historical context.²⁷ But to dismiss any perception of individuality on the part of ancient actors is surely too cavalier and is hardly rendered true just because nobody has survived to refute it. Take Phrasikleia, famously commemorated by a marble *korē* statue, dating to ca. 550 BCE and found at Merenda in Attica.²⁸ The words ascribed to her on her base – “I shall always be called maiden, having been allotted by the gods this name instead of marriage” – are clearly those of the family members who commissioned the monument, but they also indicate that such a personal internalization of one’s fate was at least thinkable. Sarah Brown Ferrario has recently argued that the origins of what we might call “Great Man Theory” can already be traced in the *Histories* of Herodotos in the fifth century.²⁹ Even Thucydides, whose preference for materialist explanations is announced early in his work, concedes that individuals can make a difference – especially in his account of the Sicilian Expedition of 415–413 BCE. Ferrario suggests that a sense of individualism progressed yet further in the fourth century and especially in the age of Alexander, and this, perhaps, offers at least one plausible explanation for the development of portraiture in Greek art.

Now, of course, case-studies such as those of the Kasta or Vergina burials, St Peter’s tomb, or Augustus’ house concern not just any individuals but “celebrities” – which probably explains why they continue to be the subject of public fascination. The obvious objection to the quest for ancient celebrities is that it is a return to “Great Man Theory” – supposedly compromised not only by the theoretical objections to methodological individualism outlined above but also by the inevitable elitist and sexist connotations involved in such an inquiry. Yet, if the textualized environment of ancient Mediterranean cultures offers the prospect of a rehabilitation of the individual in archaeology, there really is no logical reason why celebrities should be excluded. The role of archaeology is not only – or even primarily – to substitute for the lacunae in the literary record but also to offer a parallel, alternative, and sometimes even contradictory discourse to the concerns of authors, for whom, whether we like it or not, prominent individuals were a worthy subject of discussion.

That, however, is easier said than done. In fact, the material traces of ancient celebrities are remarkably elusive. An obvious explanation would be that, since famous individuals constituted such a small sub-set of ancient populations, it would be unreasonable to expect to

²⁶ Hernando 2016, 58.

²⁷ Meskell 1999, 19; Jones 2005 (cited in Knapp & van Dommelen 2008).

²⁸ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, no. 4889.

²⁹ Ferrario 2014.

find them in an archaeological record that is itself a minute sample of past activity. But that is not entirely satisfactory because it assumes, erroneously, that individuals of differing statuses are likely to be represented archaeologically on an equal or comparable basis. The Carian dynast Mausolos invested considerable resources into the design of his tomb so it is not by accident that its foundations can be identified today in Halikarnassos (modern Bodrum). In a world where conceptions of the afterlife were, at best, vague and, at worst, pessimistic, the permanent marking of the landscape was one of the few guarantees of an existence beyond the tomb. Augustus, who almost certainly took the mausoleum of Halikarnassos as the model for his own funerary monument, made doubly sure of his legacy when he appended to his mausoleum the text of the *Res Gestae*. Nor is it by chance that we are able to identify the mausoleum of Hadrian on the banks of the Tiber or the tomb of Lucius Munatius Plancus on Mount Orlando, above Gaeta. At Vergina, by contrast, we are confronted by a stubborn anonymity.

The anonymous burials at Vergina

In 1977, Manolis Andronikos of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki uncovered two tombs beneath the so-called Great Tumulus (a third was located and excavated the following year). The richest of these tombs (Tomb 2) was unlooted and, in addition to fabulously wealthy grave goods, contained the cremated remains of a man in the main chamber and a woman in the antechamber. Almost immediately, and with strong encouragement from official authorities, Andronikos declared that the male occupant of Tomb 2 was Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great.³⁰ Just as quickly, however, this identification was challenged by those who believed that Tomb 2 must postdate 336 BCE, the year of Philip's assassination, and that the cremated remains inside were more likely to be those of Philip III Arrhidaios (the half-brother of Alexander) and of his wife Eurydice.³¹ That – at times, bitter – dispute has continued unabated over the last four decades.³² In the absence of any epigraphical support, the limitation of choice to these candidates is based, firstly, on the assumption that Vergina is the ancient city of Aigeai, where Makedonian monarchs were traditionally buried, and, secondly, on the fact that, to date, no other comparably wealthy burials have been located at Vergina. The former is probable, though there has been one prominent dissenter, while the latter is inevitably subject to the contingencies of archaeological discovery.³³

In the absence of explicit evidence, attempts to identify the deceased in Tomb 2 have been based on analysis of the tomb's architecture, its contents, and the cremated remains found inside. It has been argued that the barrel vault technique, the costly golden grave goods, and the depiction of a multiple quarry hunt on the frieze above the entrance of the tomb cannot predate Alexander's conquest of the east.³⁴ That, however, would be to make the unwarranted

³⁰ Andronikos 1978; 1984.

³¹ Adams 1980; Lehmann 1980; 1982.

³² For summaries of the dispute, see Hatzopoulos 2008 (defending Andronikos' identification of Philip II as the occupant of Tomb 2), Borza, Palagia 2007 (for Arrhidaios) and, most recently, Grant 2017; further bibliography in Hall 2014, 97–117.

³³ The identification of Vergina as ancient Aigeai was originally proposed in Hammond 1970 and has received recent support in Manoledakis & Livieratos 2007. It is disputed by Faklaris 1994.

³⁴ Boyd 1978; Lehmann 1980, 528–529; 1982, 338–340; Borza 1987, 107–109; Tripodi 1991; 1998; Palagia 2000; Borza, Palagia 2007, 86, 90–103.

assumption that there was no culture contact between Macedonia and the east before 330 BCE. No overall consensus has been reached on the chronology of the grave goods,³⁵ though there is a growing opinion that the latest artefacts may be too late for Philip II's burial in 336 BCE and might therefore accord more with Cassander's reburial of Arrhidaios and Eurydice – probably in 316 BCE.³⁶

Faced with this *impasse*, attention has come to focus on the scientific analysis of the cremated remains even though the results of the four examinations conducted to date are widely divergent. The first analysis concluded that the remains were of a man, aged 35 to 55, and a woman, aged 20 to 25, but was unable to find any evidence of the wounds to the eye, clavicle, and thigh that Philip II is said by literary sources to have suffered.³⁷ At about the same time, however, Jonathan Musgrave claimed to identify a notch in the supraorbital margin of the male skeleton and a fracture along the malar-maxillary suture, which he believed to be consistent with an eye-wound.³⁸ The gruesome wax model of the male skull that Musgrave and the anatomist Richard Neave constructed became famous but is now largely discredited – in part, because it showed traumas that cannot possibly be determined by skeletal remains but mainly because it involved so much guesswork and imaginative reconstruction.³⁹ In 2000, Antonis Bartsiokas again claimed that he could find no evidence for wounds, dismissing the supposed trauma to the right eye orbit as pathological and attributing apparent facial asymmetries to warping during the cremation process and reassembly of the skeletal material when it was deposited in the gold larnax. But Bartsiokas also argued that the bones indicated a "dry" cremation, which would mean that they were unfleshed at the time they were cremated. This would fit better the circumstances of Arrhidaios' funeral, conducted some time after his murder by Olympias in 317 BCE.⁴⁰ In response, Musgrave and his team redefended the case for a "wet" cremation, though were forced to admit that this did not necessarily exclude Arrhidaios, since "Arrhidaios' body would still have had putrefying skin and muscle attached to his limb bones, and rotting viscera filling his thoracic, abdominal and pelvic cavities after even seventeen months in the ground."⁴¹

The remains have now been subjected to a fourth analysis, whose preliminary results were published online in 2015.⁴² Examination of the remains in the main chamber indicates a male of 45 ± 4 years, around 160 cm in height, whose skeleton had been fleshed at the time of cremation. Specific evidence of the wounds that are supposed to have afflicted Philip II, save for an incision on the fourth metacarpal, were not forthcoming, although indications of sinusitis *might* be the consequence of a facial wound while signs of pleuritis *might* be the effect of

³⁵ On the basis of the ceramics, Drougou 2005 (cf. 2011, 244-245) defends Andronikos' original dating of the middle decades of the fourth century.

³⁶ Rotroff 1984; 1997; Barr-Sharrar 1991, 11; Gill 2008. For Cassander's reburial of Arrhidaios and Eurydice, Diod. Sic. 19.52.5; Diyllos 73 *FGrH* 1.

³⁷ Xirotiris, Langenscheidt 1983. For Philip's wounds: Riginos 1994.

³⁸ Musgrave, Neave, Prag 1984, 61-65; Musgrave 1991.

³⁹ McLeod 2014, 6, 57-60.

⁴⁰ Bartsiokas 2000. For the murder of Arrhidaios and Eurydice, Arr. 156 *FGrH* 1; Diod. Sic. 18.2; 19.11.5-7; Just. *Epit.* 13.2.8; Curt. 10.7; Ael. *V.H.* 13.36.

⁴¹ Musgrave *et al.* 2010, 9.

⁴² Print version in Antikas, Wynn-Antikas 2016.

trauma.⁴³ The team also noted Schmorl's nodes on the lower thoracic vertebrae and marked muscle insertion sites on the long bones, which might suggest a life spent on horseback. Jolene McLeod has argued that this should probably rule out Arrhidaios, who is described in the sources as "afflicted by an incurable mental condition," "slow minded" or "epileptic."⁴⁴

While identification of the male remains in Tomb 2 has largely oscillated between Philip II and Philip Arrhidaios, a greater variety of candidates has been suggested for the female cremation in the antechamber. Andronikos originally proposed Cleopatra: according to the peripatetic philosopher Satyros of Kallatis, this was Philip II's seventh and last wife, who was murdered on Olympias' orders, along with her infant daughter, shortly after Philip's assassination.⁴⁵ For those instead who preferred to identify the male occupant of the tomb as Arrhidaios, the female remains should be those of his wife (and step-niece) Eurydice. Nicholas Hammond, who favored Philip II, pointed to three features of the antechamber that he considered significant for the identification of the deceased: (i) the absence of any infant burial, which might exclude Cleopatra; (ii) the presence of weapons, including a *gorytos* or quiver, whose closest parallels come from Scythia; and (iii) the fact that the female remains seem to have been interred in the antechamber almost immediately after the male remains. Hammond wondered whether this last observation indicated that the female had either committed suicide or was sacrificed on the occasion of Philip's cremation – a ritual known among the Getans and the Scythians. In this case, the female might be either the Thracian Meda, Philip's sixth wife, or the unnamed daughter of the Scythian king Atheas, who is said to have planned to adopt Philip.⁴⁶

The official line, taken by the Archaeological Museum at Vergina, is that the female occupant of the antechamber is Meda but Theodoros Antikas, who directed the most recent osteoarchaeological study of the remains, favors the daughter of Atheas. First, a pubis fragment that was apparently not examined by previous researchers gives an age for the female of 30 to 34, which would exclude both Cleopatra and Eurydice. Second, evidence for horse-riding from an early age, together with the *gorytos*, would point to a Scythian, rather than Thracian, princess. Third, Antikas and his team discovered that there was a compressed fracture on the left tibia, which might account for the mismatched pair of gilded greaves found in the antechamber – another indication of female martial prowess, for which the Scythians were famous.⁴⁷ Yet this interpretation ultimately rests on a fictitious – and anonymous – wife or consort of Philip II that is mentioned by no source and, even if Atheas' adoption of Philip II was intended to be sealed by a marriage (for which there is no evidence), Justin makes it clear that the adoption offer was eventually retracted.

This *aporia* is obviously created by the lack of any epigraphic testimony. This is not due to a specifically Macedonian "epigraphic habit" because names are attested on numerous

⁴³ As Riginos 1994, 106 points out, Dem. 18.67 (together with the scholiast to these lines) is the only source that refers to a wounded arm; it is not mentioned in the later tradition.

⁴⁴ McLeod 2014, 66. For Arrhidaios: Diod. Sic. 18.2.2; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 77.5; *Heidelberg Epitome* 155 FGrH 1. We cannot, however, rule out the possibility that these descriptions are the product of a deliberately negative source tradition, intended to delegitimize Arrhidaios' claims to the throne: see Fontana 1957-1958, 128-132.

⁴⁵ Satyros, *Life of Philip* in Ath. 13.557b-e. For Cleopatra's murder, Just. *Epit.* 9.7.8; Paus. 8.7.7.

⁴⁶ Hammond 1978, 335-336; 1991, 76-77. Grant 2017 defends the identification of the female remains as those of Kynna. For Atheas, see Just. *Epit.* 9.2.1-6.

⁴⁷ Antikas, Wynn-Antikas 2016.

fourth- and third-century funerary stelae from the area of Vergina.⁴⁸ Perhaps an epitaph did originally commemorate the occupants of Tomb 2 but is now lost. More likely, there was no need to advertise to passers-by the identity of those interred within. This was, after all, an impressive funerary monument in a location (Aigeai) that had ceased to serve as the Macedonian royal capital towards the end of the fifth century and was now only used as a ritual center and burial ground for the Macedonian monarchs.⁴⁹ The funerary mound that covered Tomb 2 physically perpetuated the *kleos*, or fame, of its occupants. Nor is it likely that this *kleos* was extinguished when all three tombs were buried beneath a 12 m high tumulus in the third century – perhaps at the initiative of either Lysimachos or Antigonos Gonatas.⁵⁰ Over time, however, the memory did fade – perhaps an inevitability in a part of the world which was subject to so many resettlements, forced population movements, and migrations throughout history.

It would, no doubt, be satisfying to know once and for all who the occupants of Tomb 2 at Vergina are, but an obsessive focus on this question has prematurely foreclosed other fruitful lines of inquiry. In the case of powerful individuals, Matthew Johnson has written: “[s]cholars may seek to explain events in terms of powerful or charismatic people – emperors or great leaders – but this always begs the question of where their power comes from, what makes their power possible.”⁵¹ In tracing the networks and modalities of power in which the occupants of Tomb 2 were situated, we need a more integrated investigation that considers the tomb not in isolation but in the context of other funerary complexes, both in Vergina – where monumental barrel-vaulted tombs continue to come to light – and at other sites in Macedonia. This is not to occlude the individual but rather to illuminate the social networks and symbolic and material resources that bestow individuality, even in the absence of a name.

The footsteps of the living

A built grave constitutes a physical and potentially permanent marking of the landscape. By contrast, the living leave a far more ephemeral footprint in the archaeological record. In 1978, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens published a picturebook entitled *Socrates in the Agora*, which aimed to “look to find him in the material world and physical surroundings of his favorite stamping-ground.”⁵² Yet, aside from well-known public buildings such as the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios or the Stoa Basileios, Socrates’ footsteps prove to be very elusive indeed. One building that has attracted attention is a courtyard house just outside the southwest corner of the Athenian Agora. On the basis of what have been interpreted as the accoutrements of shoemaking as well as the recovery of a *kylix* base inscribed with the name of a certain Simon, Dorothy Thompson claimed to have located the workshop of Simon the Cobbler, with whom Socrates is supposed to have held many discussions.⁵³ The identification is not impossible, but some caution is warranted. First, although Xenophon does refer to Socrates’ visits to a saddler’s shop, Simon is not named as the philosopher’s interlocutor until the

⁴⁸ Sakellariou 1983, 56; Andronikos 1984, 84; Hammond 1994, 135.

⁴⁹ Greenwalt 1999, 162-165.

⁵⁰ Hammond 1991, 78 (Lysimachos); Andronikos 1984, 228 (Antigonos).

⁵¹ Johnson 2010: 87.

⁵² Lang 1978, 2; cf. Hughes 2010, xxv.

⁵³ Thompson 1960; cf. Thompson, Wycherley 1972, 173-174.

time of Plutarch and was evidently promoted at a later period by the Cynics, who regarded him as Socrates' true heir.⁵⁴ Second, the identification of short iron nails and bone rings as hobnails for boots and eyelets for laces may depend more on modern shoemaking techniques than anything we know about ancient Greek footwear. Third, the *kylix* base on which the name of Simon is inscribed – a name, it should be said, that is not uncommon in Attica – was found outside the house in the street and cannot, on archaeological grounds, be associated unambiguously with the house.⁵⁵

Even more phantomatic is the so-called “Poros Building” – a corridor structure, southwest of the Agora, which Eugene Vanderpool proposed to identify as the state prison in which Socrates had been executed in 399 BCE.⁵⁶ Indeed, the building continues to be identified as such on site, even though the designation has been dropped from the most recent edition of John Camp's guide to the Agora.⁵⁷ Vanderpool's identification was based on location, the plan of the building, and the objects that were found inside, but none of the arguments are entirely persuasive. In terms of location, the only thing we are told about the prison in which Socrates spent his last days is that it was “near” the law court.⁵⁸ Vanderpool argued that the Poros Building was situated about 100 m away from a rectangular enclosure that had been tentatively identified as the Heliia Law Court but which is more likely, in fact, to be a sanctuary of the hero Aiakos.⁵⁹ As for the building's plan, Vanderpool's penitentiary, with its square cells, exercise yard, and guard tower owes more to Jeremy Bentham's designs for the Panopticon than to anything we know about ancient Greek prisons – which is next to nothing.⁶⁰ Finally, the thirteen small vessels, which Vanderpool conjectured were medicine pots for hemlock, were found in a third-century context.⁶¹ The Poros Building is more likely to have served some sort of industrial or commercial function and may even have housed a marbleworking establishment at the time of Socrates' death.⁶²

When I originally considered the spectral presence of Socrates in the Athenian Agora, I tentatively suggested that Athenian democratic ideology constrained the ambitions of the wealthy elites to set themselves above their peers and that all were expected to at least feign conformity to an egalitarianism that might leave little mark in the archaeological record.⁶³ After all, important fifth-century Athenian statesmen such as Cimon, Pericles, and Cleon are similarly absent from the archaeological record. This democratic ideology of “leveling” is certainly at work in Thucydides' description of state funerals for the war dead, where the remains of the fallen were mixed together, separated only by tribe, thus occluding individual and familial identity.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the practice described by Thucydides finds its epigraphical reflex in an epitaph belonging to the *Dēmosion Sēma* – the public tomb that contained the

⁵⁴ Xen. *Mem.* 4.2.1; Plut. *Mor.* 776b; cf. Diog. Laert. 2.122. See Hock 1976, 43–48.

⁵⁵ See generally Hall 2014, 78–82.

⁵⁶ Vanderpool 1980.

⁵⁷ Camp 2010, 176.

⁵⁸ Pl. *Phd.* 59c–d; cf. Dem. 24.208.

⁵⁹ Stroud 1998.

⁶⁰ Hunter 1997.

⁶¹ Crosby 1951, 182.

⁶² Rotroff 2009, 45. See generally Hall 2014, 82–93.

⁶³ Hall 2014, 94, 211. For the delicate balance that needed to be struck between Athenian elites and democratic ideology, see Ober 1989.

⁶⁴ Thuc. 2.34.2–3.

remains of Athenian casualties of 394/3 BCE, where the names of the fallen are listed without patronymics or demotics.⁶⁵

On the other hand, this democratic ideology did not go unchallenged. One of the names on the epitaph is that of Dexileos, who was separately honored by his family with an impressive funerary monument. Indeed, the non-linear placement of the monument ensured a high level of visibility and may even have been intended to stare defiantly across to the *Dēmosion Sēma*, where the young knight was actually buried.⁶⁶ Similarly, Ursula Knigge suggested that an uninscribed fifth-century bronze urn found in the Kerameikos, in a mudbrick funerary vault which later accommodated the burial of Hipparete, wife of Phanokles, may have contained the cremated remains of Alcibiades – presumably smuggled secretly into Athens from Phrygia, where he was assassinated.⁶⁷ Alcibiades was, of course, no fan of Athenian democracy. But the fact of the matter is that famous individuals are elusive in all Greek states, whether or not they were democratic. The so-called Tomb of Leonidas, which was shown to nineteenth-century visitors to Sparta, was almost certainly not the resting place of the ill-fated Spartan king.⁶⁸ At Argos, Pausanias claims to have seen not only the grave of the Epirote king Pyrrhus in the sanctuary of Demeter but also the monument that marked the site of his funerary pyre in the agora, neither of which is visible today.⁶⁹

Leaving a mark in the Eternal City

From 1956, Gianfilippo Carettoni excavated on the western part of the Palatine hill a structure that comprised a peristyle court surrounded by rooms decorated with wall paintings in the "second style." On the eastern side of the courtyard was a ramp, which Carettoni believed gave direct access to the terrace supporting what is generally believed to be the temple of Palatine Apollo. Since Velleius Paterculus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio all inform us that the temple was built on property belonging to the young Octavian, Carettoni reasoned that the house he had excavated was that of the future emperor Augustus.⁷⁰ Those findings were, however, challenged by renewed excavations at the beginning of this century by Irene Iacopi and Giovanna Tedone, who concluded: (i) that the Carettoni House was part of a much larger structure, which included two symmetrical peristyles; (ii) that the ramp did not give access to the temple terrace; and (iii) that the entire complex was unfinished at the time it was buried to make way for the sanctuary of Apollo – perhaps after the battle of Actium in 31 BCE.⁷¹ Building on – but going far beyond – this reconstruction, Andrea Carandini and Daniela Bruni have argued that, in around 39 BCE, the young Octavian originally decided to build for himself a palace that, with a surface area of around 8,600 m², was fit for a Hellenistic despot.

⁶⁵ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, no. 754.

⁶⁶ See, however, Ober 2005, 241–245, who questions whether the Dexileos monument is unambiguously anti-democratic.

⁶⁷ Knigge 1991, 109–110, on the assumption that Hipparete was the granddaughter of Alcibiades. The suggestion is intriguing but undemonstrable.

⁶⁸ See Matalas 2017, 50–51.

⁶⁹ Paus. 1.13.8; 2.21.4.

⁷⁰ Carettoni 1967, 61–64, 71; 1983, 9, 86. For the identification of the temple as that of Apollo: Pinza 1910; Lugli 1946, 468–475. For Octavian's dedication of the Temple of Apollo after his victory over Sextus Pompeius in 36 BCE: Vell. Pat. 2.81.3; cf. Cass. Dio 53.1.3. For the connection between the temple and Octavian's property: Vell. Pat. 2.81.3; Suet. *Aug.* 29.3; Cass. Dio 49.15.5.

⁷¹ Iacopi, Tedone 2006.

As Octavian “reinvented” himself, eventually adopting the name Augustus in 27 BCE, the ambitious building plans were abandoned and the incomplete palace was replaced by the Temple of Apollo. Like Iacopi and Tedone, Carandini and Bruni believe that Augustus constructed for himself a new house to the west of the temple, of which only part of a tufa peristyle remains today, but they also imagine a phantomatic second complex to the east of the temple, for which there are virtually no concrete indications.⁷²

Just as with Tomb 2 at Vergina, the problem is that we have no *in situ* epigraphic evidence to indicate the owner of the house. Worse still, Suetonius informs us that Augustus spent the last forty years of his life in a modest house he had acquired from Hortensius, which “was conspicuous neither for space nor for refinement, since it had short porticoes with columns of Alban stone and rooms without any marble or special paving.”⁷³ This is evidently at odds with the excavated structure on the Palatine and Carandini has sought to address the contradiction by dismissing Suetonius’ testimony out of hand.⁷⁴ I cautiously attempted to salvage Suetonius’ reputation by conjecturing that he may have been misled by insincere professions of simplicity in Augustus’ own correspondence.⁷⁵ Peter Wiseman, on the other hand, insists on taking Suetonius seriously. By drawing on the writings of Cicero, Sallust, Varro, Horace, and Vitruvius, he reconstructs a Late Republican ideological conflict in which the *populares* (i.e. statesmen who promoted the cause of the people) attacked a small group of aristocratic *optimates* for their arrogance and luxurious lifestyle – including the vast mansions in which they lived. Octavian, who came to prominence as a champion of the people, would therefore only have been following his principles in demolishing the sprawling, palatial property of an anonymous grandee to make way for a sanctuary dedicated to Apollo.⁷⁶ If Wiseman is correct, we lose the house of Augustus but not, of course, the individual who was the actual proprietor of the residence and if we could reconstruct the broader material context in which the house was situated, as Wiseman has done for the ideological context, then we might be able to understand better the symbolic and material channels through which the owner expressed his individuality.

At Vergina and on the Palatine, we have physical remains without names. In the Vatican, by contrast, we have a name without physical remains. When the Emperor Constantine built the predecessor to the current basilica of St Peter, he expended a great deal of effort and expense in ensuring that the high altar should stand over a niched structure (*aedicula*), which can be dated by associated tile stamps to the middle of the second century and which originally stood in an open courtyard belonging to a necropolis.⁷⁷ On the wall of the nearby Tomb of the Valerii, someone – perhaps a laborer working on the Constantinian basilica – had scratched a graffito, asking Peter to pray to Christ for the holy Christian men buried near his body. There are good reasons, then, to suppose that Constantine believed the *aedicula* to mark the grave of the apostle Peter and that this monument was what the early third-century cleric Gaius had described as the *tropaion* of Peter – though what exactly Gaius meant by

⁷² Carandini, Bruno 2008; cf. Carandini 2010. For a critique: Wiseman 2009. See generally Hall 2014, 167–85.

⁷³ Suet. *Aug.* 72.1.

⁷⁴ Carandini, Bruno 2008, 83.

⁷⁵ Hall 2014, 183.

⁷⁶ Wiseman 2014, 546–551.

⁷⁷ See generally Apollonj Ghetti *et al.* 1951; Toynbee 1953; Toynbee, Ward-Perkins 1956. For discussion: Hall 2014, 187–206.

tropaion is disputed.⁷⁸ Furthermore, another graffito that seems to refer to Peter was scratched onto the so-called Red Wall, against which the *aedicula* was built, and probably dates to the third century, when it was obscured by the construction of a buttressing wall on which Margherita Guarducci claimed to detect a palimpsest of graffiti with encrypted references to the apostle.⁷⁹

The *aedicula* did not, however, mark a grave. Beneath it was a simple pit, in which the jumbled remains of a woman in her 70s, two men in their 50s, a cockerel, a pig, and a horse had been unceremoniously pushed beneath the Red Wall.⁸⁰ Guarducci maintained that the director of the excavations had secretly removed human remains from a marble-lined niche in the adjoining buttress, placing them in a lead-lined box that then lay forgotten for twenty years in the Vatican storerooms. When it resurfaced, the contents were examined and judged to be the remains of a "robust" man between 60 and 70 years of age. Since traces of earth found on the bones matched samples taken from the area surrounding the *aedicula*, Guarducci concluded that these were the remains of Peter, originally buried beneath the *aedicula* but then transferred to the adjacent buttress – perhaps to protect them from groundwater.⁸¹ Conversely, Antonio Ferrua, another member of the original excavation team, swore until the end of his life that the niche in the buttress was empty.⁸² But, even if we do allow that human remains were transferred from beneath the *aedicula* to the niche in the cross-wall, why assume these were the relics of Peter? Surely, Constantine could – and would – have constructed a more decorous resting-place for the Prince of Apostles.

Nor is this the only case concerning Peter where we have a *lieu de mémoire* that is unassociated with human remains. In a courtyard complex beneath the church of San Sebastiano on the Via Appia, some 600 unencrypted inscriptions – many of them at least contemporary with those in the Vatican necropolis – refer to Peter and Paul as well as a *refrigerium*, or funerary meal.⁸³ A number of sources, including the fifth-century *Acts of Sebastian*, the sixth-century *Liber Pontificalis*, and the seventh-century *Salzburg Pilgrim's Itinerary*, all claim that the bodies of the two apostles were at one time buried on the Appian Way and this may also be implied in an inscription attributed to the late fourth-century Pope Damasus.⁸⁴ Yet, here too, no grave has come to light. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is almost as if the memory of the individual proves to be more resilient in the ideational realm of tradition and faith than in the material record.

Conclusion

Based on a select number of case-studies, my argument has been that the search for the individual in archaeology is not necessarily wrong-headed *per se*, although famous individuals – ancient celebrities – are surprisingly elusive. But perhaps we have got all this back to front. Our conventional understanding is teleological in that it assumes that a famous individual,

⁷⁸ Chadwick 1957, 43-44; Cullmann 1962, 118, 152-153; Walsh 1982.

⁷⁹ Guarducci 1958, 45-357; 1965, 37-42.

⁸⁰ Apollonj Ghetti et al. 1951, 120-122, 229-244. See also Curran 1996, although he conjectures (45-46) that the remains were only disturbed in the ninth century to protect them from a Saracen raid.

⁸¹ Guarducci 1965, 21, 83-160, 169-182.

⁸² Cited in Petrosillo 2001.

⁸³ Tolotti 1953; O'Connor 1969, 147-152; Nieddu 2009. For the origins of the *refrigerium*: MacMullen 2010, 602-604.

⁸⁴ Diehl 1925, no. 951.

marked by wealth, status, renown, and the capacity for action, should – all things being equal – leave an observable footprint in the archaeological record. In practice, however, it is we who search for the historical individual and it is we who read back into the past our own pre-occupations and aetiologies. The concept of the individual may not be a creation of modernity but the search for the historical individual is undeniably presentist.

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