

Alexander the Undertaker: Persians, Bactrians, and *ataphoi*

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ABSTRACT

Alexander's famous ban of the exposure of the corpses in Bactra has been long studied. Mostly the discussion has focused on the veracity of the account and his compliance with the Zoroastrian rites. The analysis of the reasons that led Alexander to the ban has hitherto been very superficial, only outlining the apparently exceptional character of that action. This paper tries to put this prohibition into a broader context. For this purpose, a look at the previous actions of Alexander in relation to the foreigners' corpses must first be taken. Also, the extremely negative conception of the unburied in the Hellenic culture, religion, and politics needs to be properly assessed. Only after this analysis, the signification of the prohibition can be rightly apprehended and integrated into the wider context of Alexander's conquest, and not regarding it as a mere king's whim. This Bactrian episode stands for a good example of how the Macedonian campaign put face to face conflicting religious practices.

KEYWORDS

Bactria; Exposure of corpses; Alexander; Stasanor of Soloi; Funerary rites; Religious scruples.

INTRODUCTION

'Now in early times the Sogdians and Bactrians did not differ much from the nomads in their modes of life and customs, although the Bactrians were a little more civilized; however, of these, as of the others, Onesicritus does not report their best traits, saying, for instance, that those who have become helpless because of old age or sickness are thrown out alive as prey to dogs kept expressly for this purpose, which in their native tongue are called 'under-takers', and that while the land outside the walls of the metropolis of the Bactrians looks clean, yet most of the land inside the walls is full of human bones; but that Alexander broke up the custom. And the reports about the Caspians are similar, for instance, that when parents live beyond seventy years they are shut in and starved to death. Now this latter custom is more tolerable; and it is similar to that of the Ceians, although it is of Scythian origin; that of the Bactrians, however, is still more like that of the Scythians. And so, if it was proper to be in doubt as to the facts at the time when Alexander was finding such customs there, what should one say as to what sort of customs were probably in vogue among them in the time of the earliest Persian rulers and the still earlier rulers?' (Strabo XI, 11.3).

The treatment of the dead is one of the most defining features of any culture. As an inevitable phenomenon in human existence, every cultural system has to respond to and resolve all the different questions and issues that death prompts. The visual expression of the nature of the world of the hereafter and the proper transition to it is embodied by articulation of a series of ritual and funerary practices that are characteristic of each culture, based on a theological discourse generated to explain the uncertainties about what is to come. Therefore, the treatment of the phenomenon of death can become an idiosyncratic element of each people, and because of its crucial importance, it evolves slowly over time. A change in the ritual may mean

an improper transition to the hereafter by the individuals that come in its wake, or perhaps the possibility that not all ancestors have been able to make a proper transition. Not only would the repercussions of this have an impact on the deceased and their particular world; it would also exert a direct influence on the realm of the living. Therefore, the encounter between different cultural systems, and thus funerary systems, may be an element of conflict. The assessment of the other's practices, if they are very different to one's own, can be extremely negative, as they can be judged as displays of impiety, disrespect or sheer abomination.

The Hellenic world's contact with the Achaemenid Empire prompted the clash between different cultural traditions, in funerary matters as well. Whether or not the Achaemenid Persian ritual adhered to the dogma of the prophet Zoroaster has sparked opposing perspectives, even based on the very same evidence. Given this complex problem, in this article, we shall restrict ourselves to the positive evidence, without entering this debate, which would go far beyond the scope of this study.¹ Therefore, we shall centre our attention on the Hellenic visions of the funerary practices in the Achaemenid Empire and, more concretely, those of its easternmost confines.

The oldest record conserved from a Greek author can be found in Aeschylus' tragedy *The Persians* in relation to the ultimate fate of the body of Darius I. The description is clear and tells that the Great King was buried in a tomb/tumulus (Aeschylus, *Pers.* 220–230, 681–693).² Shortly thereafter Herodotus devoted a few lines to funerary rites in his description of Persian customs:

'So much I can say of them from my own certain knowledge. But there are other matters concerning the dead which are secretly and obscurely told: how the dead bodies of Persians are not buried before they have been mangled by birds or dogs. That this is the way of the Magi, I know for certain; for they do not conceal the practice. But this is certain, that before the Persians bury the body in earth, they embalm it in wax' (Herodotus I, 140.1–2; cf. Herodotus III, 16; Strabo XV, 3.20; Cicero *Tusc.* I, 45.108).

In this brief paragraph, Herodotus discusses two different types of funerals: exposure of the corpses and burial (with wax embalming). The latter must not have upset the Greeks' minds, since they also applied this treatment.³ In fact, burial seems to have been the most common practice among the Persians who did not belong to the priestly class (the Magi), as Herodotus already clearly notes.⁴ Based on this author's words, one can guess that he might have been told about this rite or, even, have been a witness to it applied to a Magus, but he never dared to extrapolate this practice to the entire Persian population.

1 Without a doubt, the most fervent defender of Achaemenid Zoroastrianism was Mary Boyce (see, e.g., BOYCE 1982; 1988; 2001). In contrast, WIDENGREN 1968, 166–174 has expressed his disagreement. However, the majority of authors take a more prudent stance, leaning towards either side without excessive conviction. On the historiographical positions, see KELLENS 1997; 2012; BRIANT 2002, 894–895; GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ 2009, 219–220, n. 2. Given the approach of this paper, the compendium by DE JONG 1997 is particularly useful.

2 On the scenic elements, see LEMBKE – HERINGTON 2009, 16–17, 99.

3 Even the application of wax would not seem strange. Plutarch attests to the use of wax or honey among the Spartans: Plutarch, *Ages.* 40.4. See ASHERI *et al.* 2007, 171.

4 Herodotus VIII, 24.1 offers another example of the Persian burials. After Xerxes' victory at Thermopylae, he had 19,000 of his 20,000 victims buried in order to downplay the number of dead in the eyes of the opposing army. However, MACAN 1908, 388 sees this concealment as somewhat unviable. He considers it a creation of the Greek sources.

Another author with considerable contact with the Achaemenid Empire was Xenophon, the most celebrated member of the Ten Thousand. Even though he does not mention any Persian burial in the *Anabasis*, he does in the *Cyropaedia*. There, he describes the entombments of Abradatas, the king of Susa and his wife (Xenophon, *Cyr.* VII, 3), and of Cyrus the Great (Xenophon, *Cyr.* VIII, 7.25). Any reference to the exposure of corpses is missing. In turn, Ctesias explains Darius' order for his own tomb to be built in a mountain (Ctesias, *Pers.* F 13.19; briefer in F 13.23). It is quite telling that this physician, who supposedly lived in the court of Artaxerxes II, did not mention either the exposure of the corpses anywhere, restating this way the exceptional nature of the practice, as gathered from Herodotus. In any event, what is certain is that this rite was not observed by the Achaemenid monarchs. We can guess that the practice was not spread beyond the clergy in Persia, and in consequence, the possibilities of empirical experience would have been quite minimal.⁵

ALEXANDER AND THE DEAD PERSIANS

Alexander the Great's conquest stands as a unique chance to witness the funerary traditions of the land formerly controlled by the Persian Empire. One of the most important points is the way the Macedonian king treated fallen enemies, whom he was careful to give the appropriate funerary honours – or rather to the most prominent among them. In Granicus, he buried both the Persian generals and the Greek mercenaries from the opposing Persian ranks (Arrian, *Anab.* I, 16.6).⁶ Likewise, after his victory in Issus, Alexander gave Sisymbria and the other captured women permission to bury the most prominent Persians in their own way (Curtius III, 12.13–14; Diodorus XVII, 40.1; Plutarch, *Alex.* 21.4).⁷ Before the battle of Gaugamela, he conferred great funerary honours on Darius' wife, without skimping on expenses, burying her following the national rituals (Curtius IV, 10.23; Diodorus XVII, 54.7; Plutarch *Alex.* 30.1; Plutarch *Mor.* 338e).⁸ Several months later, Alexander did the same for King Darius III himself by sending his body from Parthia to Persia to be buried in the royal necropolis with the same honours as his forerunners on the imperial throne (Arrian *Anab.* III, 22.1, 5–6; Justin XI, 15.14–15; Diodorus XVII, 73.3; Plutarch *Alex.* 43.5–7; Plutarch *Mor.* 332f–333a).⁹ Finally, it is worth mentioning the reverence the Macedonian king showed before the tomb of Cyrus in the winter of 325/324 BC. When faced with the profanation of this sepulchre, Alexander ordered it rebuilt, along with exemplary punishment for the presumed perpetrators of the crime (Arrian *Anab.* VI, 29.4–30.2; Curtius X, 1.30; Plutarch *Alex.* 69.3–4; Strabo XV, 3.7–8; cf. GUNDERSON 1982, 190–196; BOSWORTH 1988a, 46–55; BOSWORTH 1988b, 153–154; SHAHBAZI 2003, 27; ATKINSON – YARDLEY 2009, 98–99).

The first conclusion that can be drawn from these examples is that the Persian nobility and royalty during Alexander's time still preferred burial, most likely including wax embalming (DE JONG 1997, 437; BOYCE 1982, 182).¹⁰ The fate of the corpses of other deceased individuals is

5 For later references, see DE JONG 1997, 438–439.

6 He kept the captured Greeks prisoners for a long time (Arrian, *Anab.* I, 29.5); see BOSWORTH 1980, 126–127.

7 ATKINSON 1980, 249 assumes that burial was common in ancient Persia.

8 On the circumstances of the death, see WELLES 1963, 275, n. 73; HAMILTON 1969, 78–79; ATKINSON 1980, 393.

9 On the site of the king's burial, see SCHMIDT 1970, 107; BOSWORTH 1980, 345; BROSIUS 1996, 101–104; SISTI 2001, 529.

10 Archaeologically speaking, the royal tombs are well known; see SCHMIDT 1970, 79–118.

unknown, but it seems unfeasible that all of them would have been given this layer of ritual wax before being buried (BOYCE 1982, 182; DE JONG 1997, 437). Moreover, we cannot ignore the fact that the Achaemenid army was made up of contingents from different peoples with their own particular funerary customs. Thus, this first conclusion can only be confidently ascertained for high-born national Persians.

On the other hand, the openly respectful treatment of the dead enemies that Alexander advocated differed from what the Greeks had displayed during the Greco-Persian Wars (cf. DE JONG 1997, 236–237). In Marathon, Pausanias could not find any sign of the site where the vanquished may have been buried, even though the Athenians claimed that they had done so. Pausanias concluded that they must have placed all the bodies anonymously in a common trench (Pausanias I, 32.5). However, this disposal of the bodies might not have been carried out immediately. The Lacedaemonians were able to see the deceased members of the Persian army when they arrived in Athens one day after the battle (Herodotus VI, 120).¹¹ In Plateae, apparently no initiative was taken to perform funerary rites for the fallen members of the Persian army. We can deduce from Herodotus that the bodies were exposed to the rapine of the local inhabitants – in addition to other ‘vermin’ – for long enough until their bone remains were piled up once they were totally stripped of their flesh (Herodotus IX, 83; MACAN 1908, 767–768).¹² In contrast to these veiled actions or inactions,¹³ Alexander did not hide himself when he paid great honours to the most celebrated of his fallen enemies, especially Darius and his wife.¹⁴

FURTHER EAST: EXPOSURE AND PROHIBITION

The notable exception to this apparently conciliatory policy seems to be Bactria. When Alexander reached the capital of that satrapy, Bactra/Zariaspa, he allegedly banned the local practice of exposing the corpses as a funeral ceremony. The information on this episode appears solely in Strabo’s eleventh book, who relied on Onesicritus for this passage. Strabo’s account (quoted at the beginning of the paper), written with a sense of morbid curiosity, shows a totally distorted and hyperbolic image of what Alexander and his men might have found upon their arrival. While there is still some discussion about the *vexata quaestio* of the Persians’ and their nobility’s affiliation with Zoroastrianism (see note 1), there are many fewer

11 On the Spartans’ journey and the plausibility of their seeing the Persian corpses, see MACAN 1895, 376; SCOTT 2005, 404–405, 613.

12 JACOBY 1944, 44–45 opened the doors to possible religious honours among the locals near the battlefield to earn the favour of the fallen heroes. Nonetheless, he did not distinguish between the Greek and the foreign dead. When the battle was waged between Hellenic armies, the existence of a common practice of turning over corpses between sides is documented, so that they could receive a proper burial; see *infra*.

13 During the expedition of the Ten Thousand, Greek soldiers mutilated some foes’ bodies right after the battle of Cunaxa (Xenophon *Anab.* III, 4.5). The objective was terrorising the rest of the Persians to gain some time for fleeing. Xenophon, one of the expedition’s leaders, stresses that it was an initiative of the soldiers themselves (αὐτοκέλευστοι), without any previous order from their officers.

14 The case of Bessus certainly seems to contradict this statement. According to some sources, Darius’ assassin and usurper of the royal throne was impaled and his body was left for all to see (Curtius VII, 5.40; cf. Diodorus XVII, 83.7–9; Plutarch *Alex.* 43.6). Nevertheless, it is stated that Bessus was not formally condemned by Alexander himself, but by two local assemblies in Bactra and Ecbatana (Arrian *Anab.* III, 30.5, IV, 7.3; Curtius VII, 10.10). His punishment conforms to that inflicted by Darius I on other usurpers: *DB* II 32, 33, III 43, 50. Some details of the episode, such as the order to shoot down any bird that approached Bessus’ corpse, might suggest a Zoroastrian inspiration (see *infra*).

reservations about the Bactrian land. The region of Eastern Iran and Central Asia was most likely Zoroaster's homeland. This religion's roots in the region were older and stronger than anywhere else, and perhaps so was the observance of its laws of purity.

The exposure of corpses as the funerary practice preferred by Zoroastrian dogma can clearly be found in its texts, especially in the *Vidēvdāt* (V, *passim*, VI, 44–51, VIII, 4–13). According to this doctrine, the body of the deceased becomes a highly contaminating element for the elements of nature (especially fire, earth, and water), when attacked by the forces of Angra Mainyu, the malign entity of the Zoroastrian belief system (*Vidēvdāt* VII, 1–9; HUTTER 2009). The solution is to move the remains to a relatively isolated spot in order to prevent the evil influence on the living and avoid contaminating nature.¹⁵ At that site, the body is exposed to the action of birds and other beasts, which strip the corpse of its flesh, thus eliminating the element that generates the pollution. The corpse is tied down to avert the animals from moving the remains and spreading the pollution. The 'decontamination' period lasts approximately one year. After that time has elapsed, the bones are collected and deposited in ossuaries (*astodanas* or *uz-danas*) (*Vidēvdāt* V, 13, VI, 4–5, VII, 79–80; cf. Justin XLI, 3.5). Despite this clear articulation of the procedures for dealing with corpses, the supporters of the theory of Zoroastrian Achaemenid monarchs have argued that tombs and wax embalming were used as a barrier to prevent the body from contaminating the soil – and, thus, fulfilling the funerary prescriptions.¹⁶ What is quite clear is that cremation was totally excluded, given the high value attached to fire in the Iranian world.¹⁷

Archaeology is not very useful in this case. Information on this geographic and chronological context is virtually non-existent. In any event, the scarce current information reveals that the practices were anything but uniform, showing greater complexity than evidenced by the Western authors, who likely focused on the most sensational practices. There are material testimonies of the exposure of corpses, and of other funerary treatments as well, in relation to the different peoples who moved about pre-Islamic Central Asia.¹⁸

With this context, it is impossible to confer full credibility on Onesicritus' description. From a religious standpoint, filling the city streets with corpses is inconceivable. The high degree of contamination attributed to the dead body when it was being attacked by the forces of Angra Mainyu is precisely what led corpses to be totally isolated from the rest of society and nature. Therefore, from the standpoint of the practitioner of Zoroastrianism, it would make no sense whatsoever to subject the living to the dangers of these pernicious entities. However, Onesicritus was not exactly describing this funerary practice. The text explains that those exposed were still alive at the start of the ritual, although they were seriously ill or very old. Similar customs are attributed to other peoples in Greek sources.¹⁹ However, Strabo's own

15 The men in contact with dead bodies are also isolated and they live in the Armesht-gāh, the place for the unclean: *Vidēvdāt* III, 14–21. On the purification rites, see *Vidēvdāt* IX.

16 HUFF 2004 categorises the archaeological record of burials and how they could fit with Zoroastrian dogma; cf. DE JONG 1997, 435.

17 Strabo XV, 3.14 claims that if someone threw a corpse onto the fire, he/she was condemned to death, a testimony which largely matches what is prescribed in *Vidēvdāt* VIII, 73–80. On burial, see *Vidēvdāt* III, 8 and 12. See also BOYCE 1975, 109–129; DE JONG 1997, 432–434.

18 For the Hellenistic period, see GRENET 1984, 59–79; MAIRS 2006, 58–65. For a diachronic study of the archaeological evidence of exposure in the region, see GRENET 1984, 225–276.

19 Without searching any further, in Strabo's passage itself, this practice is also attributed to the Caspians. The Hyrcanians are the ones that are associated with this practice the most often (Plutarch, *Mor.* 499d; Cicero, *Tusc.* I, 45.108; Sextus Emp., *Pyrrhon.* III, 227; Porphyry, *Abst.* IV, 21; Eusebius, *Praep.* I, 1.1 D). Porphyry and Eusebius also reported on the Caspians and Bactrians. Plutarch assigns it

paragraph may conceal the solution to this strange description: he himself explains that it is a custom of the Scythians (cf. Herodotus I, 216.2–3; Plutarch *Mor.* 499d). The varied information we have on the death of the elderly or the ill is associated with nomadic peoples or those living where resources are scarce.²⁰ The risks to the tribe's subsistence or the burden that they could cause to a nomadic people were the reasons impelling them towards this practice.

Yet these extreme situations could not be expected in the capital of a satrapy that was as rich as Bactria.²¹ At that time, Bactra was a fully developed city with a long history behind it, and it was a vital axis in the North-Eastern domains of the Achaemenid Empire. Its political and economic vitality would render the application of a practice like the one described strange. Nevertheless, it is plausible that the isolation of the dying people began some time before his death because the evil beings rushed upon the dead body directly after the death (*Vidēvdāt* VII, 1–5).²² Some illnesses were also seen as a brand stamped by Angra Mainyu on the bodies (*Vidēvdāt* II, 29 and 37). So, in order to avoid this contamination, it does not seem unlikely the application of these preventive measures (cf. Agathias, *Hist.* II, 23).²³ However, this precaution would exclude the presence of those dying people inside the city walls as well. In any case, this does not mean that the animals began to eat them before their death, either. Therefore, as Boyce concluded (BOYCE – GRENET 1991, 6–8), this information is most likely to be interpreted as an unfortunate misapprehension that mixed up the exposure of corpses (which was never done inside the city walls) with the abandonment or homicide of the weakest from other peoples – including or not pre-mortem isolation.²⁴ Therefore, this image of a 'city of bones' for Bactra must be totally discarded.

The archaeological record of the region, as mentioned above, shows a variety of rituals broader than what can be deduced from the written sources. Therefore, once again, it should

to the Sogdians (Plutarch, *Mor.* 328c) and Agathias to the Sassanid Persians (Agathias, *Hist.* II, 23). This latter passage is the only one that preserves a description of the procedure and underlines the importance of the isolation of the dying man. See DE JONG 1997, 238–243, 444–446.

- 20 The 'Ceians' in Strabo's passage are the inhabitants of the Cycladian island Ceos. Strabo claims that their law is to make those who reach the age of 70 drink hemlock (Strabo X, 5.6). Despite this, it is feasible to think that this was a generalisation made by Strabo – or his source – based on a specific episode that he himself describes. Under siege from the Athenians, the dire threat of famine led the city's inhabitants to decide to let their elderly die in order to ensure the survival of the others, even though ultimately the Athenians lifted the siege before this drastic measure was ever put into practice. Claudius Aelianus attributes a similar practice to the Dervices in eastern Persia, who killed those over the age of 70 by sacrificing the men and strangling the women. In the same passage, he also includes the Sardinians (Aelian, *VH.* IV, 1). Referring to the Dervices, Strabo reports a more detailed account of their funerary traditions – cannibalism included (Strabo XI, 11.8 and XV, 1.56). Herodotus also claims that some nomadic Indians killed the ill people and ate their flesh afterwards (Herodotus III, 99.1–2; cf. III, 38.3–4). In a more utopian vein, there is the description of some islanders by Iambulus, who after reaching a certain age – 150 years old, or after somehow suffering from a permanent impairment – took a plant that submerged them into a deep sleep until they gently slipped away (Diodorus II, 57.4–5).
- 21 Numerous ancient authors attest to the proverbial wealth of the Bactrian territory: Curtius VII, 4.26–31; Ammianus XXIII, 6.55–59, Pliny, *NH.* VI, 18, Strabo XI, 11.1–5.
- 22 I thank Alberto Cantera Glera and Frantz Grenet for their comments on this point.
- 23 On purification rites and seclusion, see *Vidēvdāt* IX, 33–35.
- 24 BOYCE 1977, 145–149 refers to practices among contemporary Zoroastrians in which dogs play a key role in the transition between life and death. This role, which never implies offering the deceased as food for the animal, may be yet another possible explanation for the misunderstanding. However, it is unclear how old these traditions really are.

be questioned whether all the social components of Bactria participated in this practice. In this case, the text seems to imply that it would not have solely been limited to the priestly class like in Persia and would have had a broader range, although it is difficult to discern whether it encompassed the entire population. Likewise, we ignore whether this hypothetical distinction was governed by ethnic, socioeconomic, religious or other factors. What does seem plausible is the historicity of Alexander's prohibition – whatever its actual extension and nature.

A brief mention of the period after the death of Alexander in a text by Porphyry discusses the satrap Stasanor of Soloi and the exposure of corpses:

'[...] the Hyrcanians put them out for birds and dogs while still alive, the Caspians when they are dead. The Scythians bury alive with the dead, or slaughter on the funeral pyre, those whom the dead most loved, and the Bactrians feed their old people alive to the dogs. Stasanor, viceroy of Alexander, undertook to stop this practice, and almost lost his power' (Porphyry *Abst.* IV, 21).

Stasanor of Soloi, a Cypriot by birth, was one of Alexander's Companions (Strabo XIV, 6.3).²⁵ After having served as the satrap of Aria and Drangiana since 329 and 328, respectively (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 7.1, 18.1–3; Curtius VIII, 3.17; cf. BOSWORTH 1995, 38–39; HECKEL 2006, 341, n. 693), he was assigned the satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana in the Partition of Triparadisi in 321 (Diodorus XVIII, 39.6; Arrian *Succ.* 1.35; cf. KLINKOTT 2000, 68–71). Stasanor did not participate directly in the conflict between Antigonus and Eumenes, although he seems to have taken the latter's side by sending him troops under the command of Stasandros, who had succeeded him in Aria and Drangiana (Diodorus XIX, 14.7). Despite this support for Eumenes, when Antigonus made a new partition in 316 after his victory, he did not dare to remove Stasanor from his post since Antigonus judged that Stasanor's complicity in supporting his rival had been without direct intervention because of the privileged position he had earned among the locals (Diodorus XIX, 48.1–2). From then on, the fate of this Cypriot satrap is unknown, although it is fairly certain that his rule met its end with Seleucus' conquest (Justin XV, 4.11; Plutarch *Demetr.* 7.2; Diodorus XX, 53.4; Orosius *Hist.* III, 23.43; Appian *Syr.* 55; cf. SCHÖBER 1981, 140–193; MEHL 1986, 134–137, 156–193).

Although the abandonment of the weakest is mentioned again in Porphyry's passage, inasmuch as it has been previously discarded for Bactra, we have to assume that the real issue was related to the funerary rite of exposure. If Stasanor strove to abolish this custom when he was appointed as the satrap of Bactria-Sogdiana, this means that the practice was resumed after Alexander left the territory, perhaps due to the laxness of the subsequent satraps. The attempt to reinstate Alexander's prohibition might have sparked a reaction from the local population. If we bear in mind the situation in 316, when Antigonus was incapable of replacing Stasanor because of his popularity among the locals, one option may be to think that he could have tried to reinstate this prohibition against exposure as soon as he reached the post in 321. Given the uprising of the Bactrians, he may have then backtracked and lifted the prohibition again. In this way, after having endangered his career, Stasanor might have adopted a more conciliatory, tolerant policy with his new subjects, similar to the tack taken by Peucestas in Persia. Further on, we shall attempt a possible reconstruction of this episode.²⁶

25 On Stasanor, see BILLOWS 1990, 448–449; HECKEL 2006, 255; YARDLEY – WHEATLEY – HECKEL 2011, 113; MENDOZA 2017.

26 On the circumstances of this prohibition, see MENDOZA 2017, 48–52. It is even possible to conjecture a kind of fabrication of the conflict based on self-interest.

Setting aside Bactria, Alexander's expedition only came upon one more case of local exposure of corpses: the Oreitai.²⁷ This people, located between Gedrosia and the mouth of the Indus, were ethnically Iranian (cf. Arrian *Anab.* VIII, 25.2; GOUKOWSKY 1976, 262). Diodorus reported on the practice of exposing corpses too, being an idiosyncratic trait that set them apart from the neighbouring peoples (Diodorus XVII, 105.1–2). Nevertheless, there is no word about Alexander banning that funerary treatment there as well. This apparent arbitrariness may be actually due to the amount of time Alexander and his men spent in each place, thus directly dovetailing with the motives that may have led to that prohibition. Their journey through the country of the Oreitai was relatively brief, little more than a whirlwind conquest on their way back from India.²⁸ In contrast, the campaign in the zone of Bactria and Sogdiana lasted more than any other leg in the campaign – over two years. A temporary nuisance is easily borne, but if it lasts over time, it becomes a source of distress. And this was no less the feeling that it must have aroused in Alexander's Hellenic contingent.

THE UNBURIED IN HELLENIC CULTURE

The fear of being left unburied was prominent among the Greco-Macedonian soldiers, and as their enemies were aware of this fear, it was a weapon that they tried to wield. Thus, during the siege of Halicarnassus, the Athenians in the Persian ranks, Ephialtes and Thrasybulus, suggested declining the request from the herald sent by Alexander to gather the corpses of the fallen Macedonians. Memnon of Rhodes stood against it and their proposal ended up being rejected (Diodorus XVII, 25.6).²⁹ A second episode occurred during the Macedonian attempt to cross the Persian Gates (Curtius V, 4.3; Diodorus XVII, 68.4; PRITCHETT 1985, 247–249; MENDOZA 2019, 247–252). Given the large number of casualties inflicted by Ariobarzanes' soldiers, Alexander was forced to flee to a safe distance. When assessing what action to take next, the king weighed the option of taking a safe detour that would take several days, but instead chose to risk crossing the Persian Gates. He did so not to leave the dead soldiers unburied and avoid dishonouring them, and without having to request the enemies the removal of the bodies, which would have been tantamount to admitting defeat. In 330, when Parmenio was executed, Cleander did not provide his consent to bury him for fear of crossing Alexander, but fearing a mutiny, he ultimately agreed to (Curtius VII, 2.32).

Denial of burial, just like that hinted in the last instance, was a political message, as also seen in the case of Cleitus the Black. After being murdered by the king, Cleitus' corpse was buried only through the mediation of Alexander, since his staff officers advocated denying him this funerary honour (Curtius VIII, 2.12). It seems at the very least ironic that some would stand for dispensing the same funerary 'rites' to the satrap of Bactria as the locals in the region. More than the murder itself, Alexander's act entailed a violation of some of the most elementary Macedonian customs.³⁰ The whole episode did nothing, but further stoke the fears of the

27 Strabo XV, 1.62 also makes a very brief reference to corpses thrown to be devoured by vultures in Taxila. The source of this information is Aristobulus. Cf. Sextus Emp. *Pyrrhon.* III, 227.

28 The fact that this mention by Diodorus is the only one that relates the Oreitai to this practice demands some caution about the reliability of this statement; cf. WELLES 1963, 423, n. 14; GOUKOWSKY 1976, 262; PRANDI 2013, 173. On the campaign and the sources, see HAMILTON 1972.

29 Prandi (2013, 38) noted that these details, unknown to other sources, may come from a Greek author. The episode is yet another opportunity to exalt the noble nature of Memnon. See also GOUKOWSKY 1976, 186.

30 Carney (1981, 154) notes that it represented coercion to the free speech of the Macedonian aristocracy, the deprivation of a trial before the army, and the rupture of the divine law of hospitality.

traditionalist officers regarding the potential drift towards the 'barbarisation' of the court and the army. The fact that deprivation of burial was viewed as a punishment, as we shall see below, implied considering Cleitus a traitor, buffered behind the legalisation of Alexander's crime by the Macedonians. However, Alexander refused that posthumous punishment for Cleitus – most likely with the episode of Parmenion in mind – to stave off even more reasons for the discontent of some of his officers and new arguments to put forward their grievances about purported barbarisation. The situation sparked by that death was already fraught enough; denying the basic rights of any Macedonian would only further complicate it.

The considerations on the meaning of the lack of burial were not new in the time of Alexander, and instead had already appeared much earlier in the Greek world. The denial of burial had been wielded as a threat even back in Homer's poems. The most feared fate after death was for the corpse to become the fodder for birds, dogs, and other beasts. For this reason, in the *Iliad*, it is a common menace to intimidate the foes with further dishonour once they would have fallen.³¹ Despite the notable time span between the Trojan War – or at least the composition of the poems that recount it – and the 4th century, the influence of epics on Alexander is undeniable.³² The fear of being left unburied survived throughout the centuries like an almost inherent feature of Greek culture, and therefore there is ample testimony of its use as coercion and punishment over time.

Within the Hellenic worldview, the corpse was simultaneously pure and polluting, with an etymological tie to the concept of sacredness as well (CHANTRAINE – MASSON 1954; GARLAND 1985, 46–47). The deceased person became a generator of miasma,³³ but if the proper rites were administered, it turned into something worthy of reverence.³⁴ Therefore, first, an unburied corpse was dangerous due to its inherent pollution, making it a threat to the cosmic order, so even affecting the gods themselves.³⁵ For this reason, it is easy to apprehend why cities enacted laws on the obligation to bury any dead person inside their boundaries.³⁶ The effect on the divine sphere explains why the status of divine law was granted to the duty to bury the deceased. Disobeying this basic rule could lead one to become the target of the gods' wrath (Homer *Od.* XI, 71–80; Sophocles *Aj.* 1130–1131, 1330–1345; Sophocles *Ant.* 75–80, 745–750; Euripides *Supp.* 563). The opening dialogue between Apollo and Thanatos in Euripides' *Alcestis* may provide insight into how this fury would have taken its course (Euripides *Alc.* 1–77). Admetus had managed to avoid his own death, but in exchange, he had to offer another life,

31 Homer, *Il.* I, 3–4, II, 391–393, IV, 234–237, XI, 450–455, 816–818, XIII, 231–234, 829–832, XV, 347–351, XVI, 833–836, XVII, 125–127, 149–153, 240–241, 254–255, 272–273, 556–559, XVIII, 175–180, 270–272, 282–283, XXII, 38–43, 66–76, 86–89, 331–354, 508–514, XXIII, 19–23, 179–191, XXIV, 209–213, 405–415.

32 Alexander visited the tombs of the Homeric heroes (Arrian, *Anab.* I, 11.5–12.1; Justin XI, 5.12; Diodorus XVII, 17.3–18.1; Plutarch *Alex.* 15.7–8; Strabo XIII, 1.26; Malalas VIII, 1.193; Aelian *VH.* IX, 38, XII, 7) and he emulated Achilles. Alexander's reverence for Homer's oeuvre is exceptionally exemplified by the anecdotes about the *Iliad* under his pillow (Plutarch *Alex.* 8.2) and the golden chest in which he later stored his copy (Plutarch, *Alex.* 26.1). Cf. COHEN 1995; CARLIER 2000.

33 For the corpse as miasma, see PARKER 1983, 32–48.

34 Perhaps the clearest example is the purification of Clytemnestra with fire in Euripides *Or.* 39–40: 'It is now the sixth day since the body of his murdered mother was committed to the cleansing fire'.

35 The most illustrative story of what could happen if a body was not duly buried is found in Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which it ends up influencing the entire city (Sophocles *Ant.* 999–1030). The corpse as an element of infection also affects the gods: Euripides *Alc.* 22–23: [Apollo] 'But I must leave this Palace's dear roof, for fear pollution soil me in the house'; Euripides *Hipp.* 1437–1439: [Artemis] 'And now farewell! 'tis not for me to gaze upon the dead, or pollute my sight with death-scenes, and e'en now I see thee nigh that evil'.

36 In Attica: Aelian, *VH.* V, 14.

ultimately the life of his wife Alcestis. In the dialogue, Thanatos makes it clear that he cannot be deprived of his possession without fair compensation. If this 'norm' is extrapolated to the case of the unburied, Death, if deprived of a soul, would strive to compensate for the loss with a substitute. Once again, the direct effects to be mitigated were those affecting the living, as they were the potential targets of this compensatory death. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the main person impacted by the failure to practise the suitable funerary rites was the deceased.

This last aspect lets us understand why the denial of this right had the goal of punishing the deceased person. What the lack of burial meant, according to what it can be gleaned from the epics and tragedies – and as alluded to by the comment on *Alcestis* –, was the inability of the dead person to reach Hades and being fated to remain tied to this world as an errant soul instead (Euripides *Hec.* 27–34; Euripides *Tr.* 1081–1082).³⁷ First, this would have proved a hindrance to reuniting with one's family in Hades and would have condemned the deceased to utter solitude (GARLAND 1985, 66–68; STEINER 2009, 142). Hellenic Hades was not comparable to Christian Hell – nor Heaven. Instead, it could be a place of pleasures which included leisure, drink, banquets, and sex – which could even end up in marriage (GARLAND 1985, 70–74). Therefore, depriving a person of their existence in the afterlife by keeping them bound to an intermediate state, without fully belonging to either world, was a real curse. Even though there are signs of belief in a punishment system in the afterlife, they most likely played a marginal, minor role in Greek religiosity (GARLAND 1985, 60–66). Therefore, depriving the body of burial ensured that evil acts would not go unpunished upon death, in addition to being a horrifying threat to wield against one's enemies. Nonetheless, it is difficult to discern a man in the street's belief of what was to come after death. The image conveyed by the intellectuals might not necessarily match what the rest of the population shared, and the latter apparently did not have such a clear stance on the afterlife (MIKALSON 1983, 74–82).

The context of war, as hinted at in Homer, is what prompted the most situations in which proper burial might have been denied. When the battle pitted Greek armies against each other,³⁸ there was a common – and thoroughly documented – custom of the sides exchanging corpses, so they could be properly buried and thus avoid the dishonour that denial entailed.³⁹ The violation of this practice, as in the case of the Boeotians with the Athenians in Delium during the Peloponnesian War, caused a great deal of upheaval within the Hellenic community (Thucydides IV, 97 and 99).⁴⁰ The Boeotians made a similar threat to the Lacedaemonians in Haliartus, forcing them to withdraw under the menace of not returning the corpses to them (Xenophon *Hell.* III, 5.24). In both cases, the threat of leaving the fallen unburied was used as a coercive move in the negotiations. After the battle of Aegospotami, Lysander executed the Athenian prisoners and denied them burial because of the illegal treatment of their own captives (Xenophon *Hell.* II, 1.31–32; Pausanias IX, 32.9). We should add to these three cases

37 It would not be an irreversible situation, *a priori*, since burial would ultimately allow the deceased person eternal rest: Lucian *Philops.* 31 and Homer *Il.* XXIII, 71–74; Homer *Od.* XI, 71–80.

38 Although, as we have seen, when it involved a barbarian opponent, the application of this law was not so clear; see *supra*.

39 Euripides *Supp.* 311 and 526 speak directly as a law of all Greeks. Plutarch dated back to Heracles' and Theseus' respectful treatment of enemies (Plutarch *Thes.* 29.4–5).

40 The resemblance between the events in Delium and those depicted in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* has led several authors to seek the inspiration for this play in this real event – dovetailing with the debate on the exact date when it was written. For a bibliographic summary of the discussion, see HORNBLLOWER 1996, 309. Among those who claim a tie between the events at Delium and those depicted in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, see BOWIE 1997, 45–56. A similar suggestion has been put forward for plays by Sophocles, see *infra*.

the one mentioned above in the siege of Halicarnassus, which may not have ultimately been carried out but would have most likely been used for this very same purpose.

Indeed, the obligations of any military leader included protecting his dead (Onasander 36, 1–2). The omission of this duty, which was quite exceptional, is expressly reported in the sources and could lead to dire consequences for the erring commandant (PRITCHETT 1985, 235–241). One paradigmatic example is the death sentence to the Athenian *strategoí* in the Battle of Arginusae.⁴¹ Despite their triumph, earlier on they had been forced by bad weather and the churning sea to abandon the corpses of some of those who had gone down with their fleet. Upon their return to Athens, in the midst of political manoeuvring by civic factions, they were judged and sentenced to death (Diodorus XIII, 100.1–4 and 101–103.2; Xenophon *Hell.* I, 6.34–35 and I, 7).⁴² In Lycurgus' speech against Leocrates, among his accusations, he cited the latter's neglect of the corpses of the fallen in Chaeronea as one of the most egregious (Lycurgus, *passim*, especially 45 and 144). An echo of this responsibility can also be gleaned from Alexander's situation at the Persian Gates, where he was forced to endanger himself yet again to avoid dishonouring his soldiers who had already fallen there (GREENWALT 1986, 216). The deceased did not lose the rights to their transition, but they were incapable of defending those rights. Therefore, the guarantors that they were fulfilled had to be the living.

However, the denial of burial did not remain a mere threat but was actually applied. Because it was so feared, the violation of the right to burial played an important role in episodes of uprisings or repression as an element that propagated terror and/or as the culmination of vengeance (Diodorus XVI, 16.4, XVII, 118.2, cf. XIX, 49.4; Plutarch *Nic.* 28.5, *Lys.* 28.6 and 29.2). Funeral honours were denied not only during episodes in which the rule of law was suspended; even when it was in force, the laws stipulated its practice as a punishment for certain kinds of serious crimes, such as sacrilege and treason (Xenophon *Hell.* I, 7.22). Denial of burial for sacrilegious held the status of Panhellenic law, just like the exchange of corpses, as discussed above.⁴³ The accusation of treason could be more subjective and was most commonly the cause alleged to legitimise arbitrary sentences in times of upheaval.

Most of the information about this comes from Athens, in which there were different ways corpses were deprived of burial. One possibility was to cast the corpse into an area that was inaccessible to any relative or friend of the victim – although there was no explicit ban on attempting the recovery (DUCREY 1968, 202–204; PARKER 1983, 170; cf. GERNET 1936, 329). In Attica, the place chosen to deposit those corpses was the Βάραθρον, a long pit in Κεiriάδαι, a northwest suburb of Athens (Herodotus VII, 133.1; Xenophon *Hell.* I, 7.20–22; Plato *Rep.* IV, 439e–440a; Plutarch *Them.* 22.2; Thucydides II, 67.4; Suda s.v. Βάραθρον). In Sparta, the equivalent was the Καιάδας (Thucydides I, 134.4; Pausanias IV, 18.4–7; Suda s.v. Καιάδας). There is evidence of similar procedures in other places around the Hellenic world, such as casting bodies off cliffs or ravines or into the sea.⁴⁴ The second option was to deny them burial only

41 Nicias had also left unburied the fallen ones in the final battle of the Sicilian campaign one year earlier. Who knows if he would have gone through a similar trial had he not been captured and executed in the withdrawal: Thucydides VII, 72.2 and 75.3.

42 One view that integrates both sources can be found in UNDERHILL 1900, 325–334. In Syracuse, Hermocrates also manoeuvred with the unburied remains of soldiers in order to inspire the people to rise up against Diocles, who ended up in exile: Diodorus XIII, 61.6 and 75.4.

43 Diodorus XVI, 25.2, the Locrians refused to return the dead Phocidians, stating that it was a common law of all Greeks to deny burial to those who had plundered temples. Eusebius reported that regarding this matter, Philo of Alexandria stated that there were three possible punishments for those who plundered temples: being tossed from a cliff, strangled or burned (Eusebius *Praep.* VIII, 14.32–33).

44 In Phocis: Diodorus XVI, 35.6; Aeschines II, 142; Demosthenes XIX, 327; Pausanias X, 2.4.

within the confines of the city (Plato *Leg.* IX, 854e–855a; Thucydides I, 138.6; Plutarch, *Mor.* 834a–b; Lycurgus 113–115; Lysias XIX, 7; Hyperides I, 20, IV, 18). Just as in the previous case, there does not seem to have existed any subsequent norm that prevented the deceased person's relatives or friends from carrying out the prescribed funerary honours, as long as the rites were not performed within the city limits (Plutarch *Phoc.* 37.3–5). The prohibition could also be applied posthumously and lead to the disinterment of the deceased if he/she was found guilty of crimes of this nature (Lycurgus 113).

Traitors – definition of this term being inherently flexible – and those who attacked temples were ultimately the same kind of criminal: the kind that exposed the entire community to danger – either human or divine – because of their actions, which was also an offence of perjury for betraying the citizen oath (Lycurgus 76; MIKALSON 1983, 94–95). Therefore, it appears logical that they shared the very same punishment. The reasoning behind the denial of burial for Ajax in Sophocles' homonymous tragedy embodied this sense too. The long discussion on the legitimacy and appropriateness of this punishment seems to equate Ajax's madness with Teucrus' desire to bury him properly (Sophocles *Aj.* 1037–1184, 1325–1401). Both cases entailed the dismissal of the rational law that was supposed to rule a civilised lifestyle, which is both its origin and its underpinning. Actions that could be interpreted as subversive to the social order had to be unconditionally punished in order to prevent that kind of chaos from spreading to the rest of society (STEINER 2009, 147–148).⁴⁵ The dichotomy between divine and human laws is the cornerstone of this argumentation.⁴⁶

Therefore, ethically and legally upholding those punishments entailed stripping the offender of his/her fully human status. The denial of burial usually came with the confiscation of assets. Thus, the punishment took ἀτιμία or the loss of rights to its utmost expression, extending its application beyond life to death. By losing their citizen status, they also lost the rights that came with this status, such as burial.⁴⁷ What is more, it was also one of the ways to keep possible divine revenge away from the community.

The corpse's capacity to generate miasma depended on the person's actions prior to death: the virtuous man did not generate too much pollution, unlike those who committed censurable acts (PARKER 1983, 41–43). The procedures for denying someone a proper burial must be understood in the same vein. A careful examination of the evidence shows that there was not a fully active deprivation. The laws did not stipulate an implicit ban on the possibility of later rescuing the corpses and carrying out the appropriate rites on them. It was simply limited to placing barriers to that possibility and lowering to the fullest its chances of happening. This ambiguity might have been a way of avoiding subsequent responsibilities with the gods, who, as it has been shown, condemned those actions. Furthermore, those practices avoided the extra pollution caused by those subversive elements as well. For a Greek, the profound political meaning of the loss of rights, with dishonour for both the individual and his family, could be more compelling than the uncertain fury of the gods. Therefore, burial was the ulti-

45 The remark on the barbarian language in which Teucrus makes his plea (Sophocles *Aj.* 1263) reinforces this conception of the law as a basic element in the order that separates humans and animals, civilisation from barbarism.

46 Steiner (2009, 149) notes the possibility that the writing of Sophocles' plays *Ajax* and *Antigone* was associated with contemporary events. On the one hand, it may be a defence of familiar funerary practices compared to the rising state intervention in these matters. On the other hand, there could be a connection with the interest in burying Themistocles (Thucydides I, 138.6), despite the possible objections of the Athenian legal system, becoming a reflection of this dialectic between divine and human laws.

47 It must be merely recalled that the barbarians were not guaranteed that sacred right, see *supra*.

mate expression of their affiliation with the Hellenic way of life until death and a necessary display of pride.

The importance attached to burial was only denied by currents of thinking like cynicism – namely, the provocateur Diogenes of Sinope – and Epicureanism. Epicurus believed that the wise man should not have to worry about his own burial, among other worldly concerns (Diogenes Laert. X, 118). In contrast, Diogenes went even further by advocating leaving his corpse for the beasts (Diogenes Laert. VI, 79; Cicero *Tusc.* I, 43.104; Stobaeus *Flor.* IV, 123.11 – here explicitly choosing to share a fate like those of the Hyrcanians or the Indians). Among his constant subversive performances and sayings against Greek traditions, this must have been one of the most extreme for his contemporaries.⁴⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that his disciple Onesicritus showed an interest in the practice observed in Bactria (Diogenes Laert. VI, 84). Generally speaking, the extant fragments by this author tend to mention curious and surprising facts – some of them flagrantly exaggerated –, which are oftentimes only known through his texts. This is why some of his claims are shrouded in a cloud of reasonable scholarly scepticism.⁴⁹

Strabo's passage reflects well the exaggerated style found in some of Onesicritus' fragments. Throughout his works, Onesicritus presented Alexander as an exemplary 'philosopher in arms' (BROWN 1949 *passim*; PEARSON 1960, 83–111; PÉDECH 1984, 71–157). Therefore, Onesicritus likely included the Bactrian ban as an example of a wise, just measure by the Macedonian king. Onesicritus was the origin of the confusion between the exposure of the deceased and the dying found in Strabo's text. Based on a real practice, namely the exposure of corpses, Onesicritus might have devised another moralising anecdote about the 'philosopher-king' Alexander. Despite his apparent contempt towards traditional funerary rituals, Diogenes did advocate respect for the elderly (Diogenes Laert. VI, 65).⁵⁰ With a slight modification, relying on practices attested among nomadic peoples, the exposure of the dead could be transformed into the exposure of the elderly and the dying. Thus, the cynical stance could be matched with the Macedonian king's ban and so making it a decision totally congruent with the cynical postulates. Therefore, a likely reconstruction is that Alexander did ban the exposure of corpses and that Onesicritus reformulated the episode to present it from a perspective that did not frame that prohibition as an arbitrary ruling but instead as wise, rather underlining the treatment of the elderly and dying, than that of the dead.

PROJECTIONS OF THE BACTRIAN PROHIBITION

This lengthy digression on the conception of the lack of burial in the Hellenic world makes it easier to understand the impact the vision of the Zoroastrian exposure of corpses might have caused upon the Greco-Macedonian troops. What still remains unsolved, however, is the actual

48 Despite Diogenes' apparent disdain for his body once dead, it ended up being a source of dispute between his disciples and he was apparently ultimately buried in Corinth (NAVIA 1998, 34–35). The philosopher's lack of concern with his own burial compared to the interest of his acolytes is reminiscent of that of Socrates and Crito (Plato *Phd.* 116a; Cicero *Tusc.* I, 43.103). Diogenes' stance towards his own burial did not clash with his postulates on the circulation of the elements and their presence everywhere, meaning that he had no objections to the practice of cannibalism (Diogenes Laert. VI, 73).

49 On Onesicritus and his historiographical value, see BROWN 1949.

50 Brown (1949, 51–52) considered that exposure may go against the cynical precepts if it was interpreted as a practice that ran counter to nature. Nonetheless, caution must be advised, since there was no obligation for the follower Onesicritus to support Diogenes' position.

extent of this practice within the region. As discussed above, archaeology shows a divergence of practices, but there is no indication that allows decisively establishing a criterion that determined this divergence. The ethnic factor is no doubt the one that would explain these differences the most readily by equating a culture with certain practices. Nevertheless, as hinted at in the case of Persia, there might have existed a distinction in the funerary rituals followed in the different echelons of the local society. If the difference actually laid in a matter of social class – being exposure a particular practice either of the upper or the lower classes –, there would be two possible ways of interpreting Alexander's prohibition. Obviously, the forthcoming reconstructions must necessarily remain speculative until further archaeological data permits the assessment or the denial of the existence of different funerary rites depending on social status in Bactria.

If it was a practice peculiar to lower classes, it would mean that it was followed by most of the local inhabitants. In this case, the discomfort would be too onerous for the Greek and Macedonian contingents to remain unruffled in view of a practice that they conceived as aberrant – and, moreover, pernicious – because Alexander's army stood in Bactria for an extended period of time. Omission of burial was thought of as a real threat to the community because it was a source of both divine punishment and contamination. What is more, it is plausible that the countless difficulties that those troops faced during the campaign in that region and in neighbouring Sogdiana might have unleashed superstition among Alexander's soldiers and rendered every setback a curse from the gods.⁵¹ Certainly, they felt ill at ease, just like the rebellious settlers later claimed (see below).

Despite the potentially exaggerated input from Onesicritus, a reading of the passage in Strabo may suggest that exposure was quite a widespread practice and was not limited to minority social strata. Thus, it might have been a common practice among a large part of society, disregarding for now whether the elites were actually included or not. If so, exposed corpses would simply be an everyday matter and therefore difficult to neglect, despite that ritual was not truly performed inside the city walls. The settlement of the compelled Greek colonists after the pacification of the region was troublesome. The most palpable sign of the settlers' discontent was their two attempts to rise up and flee in 325 and 323 (Curtius IX, 7; Diodorus XVII, 99.5–6, 18.7; SCHÖBER 1981, 27–37; HOLT 1995, 81–91; ILIAKIS 2013). Given the extremely negative view of this practice in the Greek world, it may well have been one of the most compelling reasons for their claims of total alienation towards their new home. It is possible that in view of the potential conflict exposure could spark, Alexander decided to ban the practice to avoid an initial cause of internal disputes and as a sign of goodwill towards the soldiers and colonists who had to stay back. The information on Stasanor's new prohibition suggests that Alexander's ban had not been continued by his predecessors in the satrapy, and its restoration may have also been motivated by his desire to show himself as conciliatory with the clearly discontented colonists (MENDOZA 2017, 50–52).

In addition to stabilising the Greek settlers, the survival of the Macedonian domination necessarily entailed cooperation with the conquered elites, who, in turn, aimed at preserving or enhancing their *status quo*.⁵² All the ties were established between representatives of the Macedonian power and prominent elements within the local population, such as Oxyartes, whose daughter Alexander married. That mutual need led to an attempt to smooth all the

51 For a detailed account of the campaign, which lasted slightly over two years, see HOLT 2005. The title of the work (*Into the Land of Bones*) comes precisely from Strabo's paragraph.

52 This system was nothing new. The classes that benefitted from the central power were essential to the survival of the Achaemenid Empire, and they went to great lengths to publicly show these ties. See KUHRT 2010, 615–624; KAPTAN 2013, 37–39.

rough edges that the new association might have prompted. Here is where the second possibility may come into play, namely that exposure was a practice common to or widespread in the upper classes of those conquered territories. In terms of religious beliefs, the mutual aversion of the way the dead were treated by the other part – respectively, the abomination of cremation and simple burial in Zoroastrianism, and the exposure of corpses in the Greek religiosity – might have necessarily caused tensions for the attached potential risk attributed to them. These considerations might have had some other social effects. For example, one usual way for reinforcing the bonds among the elites was marriage, as exemplified by the so-called Susa weddings – or Alexander’s aforementioned marriage with Bactrian Roxana. These marital unions may have also been necessary among the Greek colonists, given that the vast majority were men.⁵³ The creation of family ties might have likely been yet another determining factor in rooting those forced settlers in the region, and one that might have been very useful to Alexandre’s goals. Therefore, it would become yet another factor that could hinder the feasibility of creating ties among the upper classes of both communities, as well as among the colonists. Expecting different fates in the afterlife – which would impede reunion after death – would be a notable obstacle to establishing mixed marriages, as would the uncertainty and unease caused by the possible omission of the traditional rituals that offspring was supposed to guarantee (see below).

It must be underscored that this reasoning should not be confused with Tarn’s idealised vision of Alexander aiming at a veritable union of humankind in his empire,⁵⁴ which betrays a degree of ingenuousness and has been refuted time and time again (e.g., BADIAN 1958). This somewhat naïve vision certainly seems to be far from Alexander’s real purposes. Historiography has often conveyed the image of Alexander as a permissive ruler with all kinds of religious and social practices, with Bactria being a noteworthy and uncomfortable exception. Nevertheless, this is not what this openness to different viewpoints attributed to the Macedonian king really meant. For all practical purposes, Alexander’s celebrated tolerance was limited to noncommittal sacrifices to local gods, sporadic participation in traditional rituals, and the convenient maintenance of the elites and religious institutions (cf. FREDRICKSMEYER 1958, 302–311). None of these practices caused any great upheaval in the Greco-Macedonian religious mindset (FREDRICKSMEYER 1958, 212). Therefore, at no time was Alexander’s stance on these matters extremely revolutionary. However, this filter did not allow for practices that ran totally counter to the basic models established in the Greek world, such as the family model. This was one of the points where Alexander did meddle in local traditions. It is interesting for this point to cite a passage from Plutarch:

‘[...] But if you examine the results of Alexander’s instruction, you will see that he educated the Hyrcanians to respect the marriage bond, and taught the Arachosians to till the soil, and persuaded the Sogdians to support their parents, not to kill them, and the Persians to revere their mothers and not to take them in wedlock. O wondrous power of Philosophic Instruction, that brought the Indians to worship Greek gods, and the Scythians to bury their dead, not to devour them!’ [...] (Plutarch *Mor.* 328 c).

53 See, however, BURSTEIN 2012, who defends that those women were captives from other Asian countries who already entered Bactria with the main army.

54 Especially in TARN 1933. Episodes like the banquet of Opis (Arrian, *Anab.* VII, 11.7–9) and the Susa weddings (Arrian, *Anab.* VII, 4.8; Diodorus XVII, 107.6; Justin XII, 10.9–10; Plutarch *Alex.* 70.3; Plutarch *Mor.* 329d–e, 338d; Athenaeus *Deipn.* XII, 538b–539a; Aelian *VH.* VIII, 7) are the main ones within this reasoning on alleged fraternity.

Obviously, caution is most advised when reading this paragraph. Rather than try to extract precise historical information on each region from it, it must be regarded as a rhetorical exposition that stresses the most alienating customs for Hellenic standards that Alexander might have to face and revert to allow the outcome of a social and territorial stabilisation.⁵⁵ Needless to say, all the changes were one-way; that is, the 'barbarians' were always the ones who had to adapt their customs to accommodate the Greeks. With the relative exception of India – they could have easily borne locals worshipping other gods –, the remaining examples directly refer to practices that would stand in opposition to the typically Greek lifestyle. For the Arachosians, the meddling was essentially economic – although it would also have implications on the social and political order –, but for the Hyrcanians, Sogdians, Persians, and Scythians the intervention would have taken place within a family/domestic setting.

There is no need to further emphasise the importance of burial in the Hellenic world, but certainly, this fundamental right would have been endangered one way or another in three of these cases: Hyrcanians, Sogdians, and Scythians. Subverting family models was tantamount to subverting the very lifestyle itself. Those other customs would have put such deeply-rooted family institutions as respect for parents at risk from the Greek standpoint. Care of parents in old age and proper funeral honours were the offspring's unavoidable duty. If the father had committed certain crimes against the son – e.g., prostituting him (Aeschines I, 13) or not teaching him any trade (Plutarch *Sol.* 22.1) –, the first duty could be lifted, but the second could never be evaded. Deprivation of burial was not a question to be settled within the family, but an inalienable right that only the political authorities could deny as an act of punishment, entailing an extreme stripping of rights.⁵⁶ Therefore, Alexander's social model was far away from cultural syncretism. Local traditions could be tolerated as long as they did not contradict the essential paradigms of Hellenic society and culture. Being so, the exposure of corpses shook the most primary superstitions and the underpinnings of the social order in the Greek world, and therefore it was difficult to be allowed under this model.

55 Nevertheless, Plutarch's statements were not totally original. Many of them can be traced back to previous writers. The laxity of the Hyrcanian marriage was attributed to the Massagetae and/or the Scythians by Herodotus (I, 216.1). The killing of the elders related with other peoples in the sources has been already addressed; see notes 19 and 20. The Persian next-of-kin marriage was a well-known motif by the Greek authors, especially inside the royal family: Herodotus III, 31–32; Ctesias *Pers.* F 13,55, F 44; Strabo XV, 3.20; Curtius VIII, 2.19; Plutarch, *Art.* 23.3–6, 27.9; Aelian NA. VI, 39; Valerius Max. IX, 2, ext. 7; see BROSIUS 1996, 45–47; DE JONG 1997, 427–432; BRIANT 2002, 93. On the Scythian cannibalism, see Herodotus I, 216.2–3, IV, 26.1, cf. IV, 106. On the Arachosian agriculture, see BRIANT 2002, 444–445, 808. If there is a historical basis for all these alleged practices or they are just a list of *topoi* is beyond the scope of this paper; cf. DE JONG 1997, 440–441; ASHERI *et al.* 2007, 217 and 600–601. It is clear that Alexander was not responsible for that supposed sudden change of customs, no matter what Plutarch claimed. On this passage from Plutarch, see GILLEY 2009, 220–228. I thank Alberto Cantera-Glera for his useful remarks on this matter.

56 Likewise, the parents' crimes and punishments could be 'inherited' by the children, see e.g., Plato *Leg.* IX, 856d; Plutarch *Mor.* 558f–560a. For this reason, sometimes family members were also condemned to exile: OGIS 8, A 20–25. The families were regarded as accursed, as can be read in the previous epigraphic document from Eresus and in the famous case of the Athenian Alcmeonids: Herodotus I, 61.1, V, 71.1, V, 72.1; Thucydides I, 126.11–12; Aristotle *Ath.* 2.2. Another celebrated case is that of Arthmius of Zeleia, who was condemned for having taken the Median gold: Demosthenes IX, 42, XIX, 271, XXV, 30; Aeschines III, 258–259; Dinarchus II, 24–25; Ael. Aristides I, 369; Plutarch *Them.* 6.4. See other cases in Demosthenes XXI, 113, XXII, 34, XXIII, 62, XXIV, 200–201, XLIII, 58, XLVIII, 2; Andocides I, 74–76.

Most likely, new practices spread more easily among the local nobility than among the lower classes, since no major social or political benefit could be got from – nor achieved by – the latter. We should also wonder to what extent those new customs were forcefully imposed in fact by the new Macedonian power to the elite. It is entirely feasible that there was some degree of voluntary adoption by the prominent local families in order to win the favour of the new dominators and maintain their *status quo*, especially by forging marital alliances with them. Plutarch's passage seems to lean in this direction too, since he never speaks about a direct imposition of these practices – although it must be admitted that any negative remark would have been likely concealed given Plutarch's approach for that essay. Ensuring compliance with these new customs among the bulk of the population would be complicated because some of them mostly took place 'behind closed doors' – especially in rural communities, where Macedonian implementation should have been more tenuous. The only possibility for more vigorous and effective coercion would have been for practices with a more public projection, such as, precisely, the exposure of corpses.

It has been posited above that the exposure of the deceased might have been a regular practice among the common folk, but no firm conclusion can be reached for the nobility. In any event, the processes prompted by the application of the funerary ban are to be distinguished. First, there might be a broader proper prohibition affecting the common folk, who did not get back any subsequent direct benefit. Furthermore, the privileged minority might have possibly embraced a 'voluntary' conversion of the customs, which might have entailed for them a series of social and political advantages in their relationship with the new hegemonic power. Even though the local elite might have already had their own distinctive rite (see above), its members might have equally adopted that brand new visually distinct public display as a signal of their privileged position in relation to the new dominators. Nevertheless, it should not be neglected that the elite's importance and power was rooted in the influence they could exert over their countrymen. Thus, they had avoided losing their ascendancy and so become irrelevant for the Macedonian interests. Elites, in consequence, aimed at finding a most needed equilibrium to remain relevant actors in their lands.

The double-dealing which the local nobility might have simultaneously engaged in with their compatriots and conquerors may lay behind the emergence of internal conflicts, such as the one suffered by Stasanor of Soloi. The satrap might have reinstated the prohibition when he took on the post in 321, probably as a conciliatory gesture towards the unruly Greek colonists (MENDOZA 2017, 48–52). However, at the same time, it must have also signalled the onset of indigenous discontent. The local nobility, for their own benefit, might have played a passive role in order to avoid compromising their future, without either actively appeasing or supporting the uprising. With that stance, they sought to stake their claim to their new determining role in the stabilisation of the country to the new governor, as the necessary mediators between the Macedonian administration and the locals. The fact that control was later regained and presumably the banned practice was restored reflects that they ultimately achieved their objective.

Perhaps, by convincing Stasanor of the unsuitability of that policy and/or becoming the mediators in the conflict that the prohibition prompted, not only did they manage to keep undamaged that beneficial system, but no doubt improved their position with both the Hellenic ruling class and the local lower classes as well. On one hand, Stasanor could salvage the situation, and maybe he gained in this way the esteem of his local subjects, as well as he might have tightened his bonds with the regional leaders, while assessing the important role the latter were bound to play for his effective control over Bactria. As shown above, Stasanor ended up having a strong, consolidated position which turned him into an independent sovereign *de facto*.

On the other hand, the local elites might have proved their 'committed' benefaction toward their fellow countrymen by having exposure restored. Moreover, they were back in a situation in which the clear visibility of the individual's social affiliation within a group could be based on specific practices, such as funerary rites. The regional upper class might have embraced a voluntary Hellenization, consolidated through marital alliances and seizing any available chance to distinguish themselves from the other locals. Failure to bury corpses was still aberrant in Greek settlers' eyes, but the memory of the uprising unquestionably quietened many of their complaints for a time. Perhaps, some kind of spatial delimitation was agreed on, with the likely mediation of the local elite, to facilitate communal living. Likewise, their sociopolitical usefulness for the Macedonian power – and later Stasanor's own – and would have discouraged new attempts to ban this practice.

In conclusion, even though it was grounded upon religious scruples, the prohibition on exposing corpses had an eminently political and social application. The shaping and stabilisation of the conquered and colonised regions play a key role in understanding the motivations behind Alexander's and Stasanor's prohibitions (and restorations). The approach to religious principles wielded by the powers-that-be was always pragmatic, and under no circumstances was it a hindrance to the implementation of the policies that were the most beneficial to their interests. The need to settle down the unwilling Greek colonist community likely prompted both prohibitions, but Stasanor was forced to retract, countered by a local power who was later able to domain and use it for his own benefit.

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