

THE BODY IN CONFLICT

IN THE ROMAN IMPERIAL PERIOD



Workshop | July 19, 2024
Programme & Abstracts

Cover, Drawing: Section of a sarcophagus relief (Roman, 2nd cent. AD)
from C. Robert, *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs II, Mythologische Cyklen*, 1890, pl.60

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VENUE

Freie Universität Berlin

Fabeckstraße 23-25

14195 Berlin

Holzlaube: Room 0.2051

Organised by Anke Walter (Newcastle University / BAK Fellow 2024) and Burkhard Emme (Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Klassische Archäologie)



www.berliner-antike-kolleg.org/link/body-in-conflict

The conference is part of the the BAK annual theme 2023/24

“Conflicts [and how to] deal with them”

Conflict is an eminently physical phenomenon, one that often leads to the violent confrontation of bodies, to destruction, and death. According to its original meaning, the word „conflict“ emphasises the physical aspect of an altercation between two opponents (Latin *confligere*: to strike, bring together). The central meaning of the (human) body is therefore inherent to the concept of conflict. Nevertheless, the use and significance of the body in conflict situations can vary. The spectrum ranges from threatening gestures and physical attacks to the physical destruction of an opponent. Conflicts also bring with them an intense interplay between invisible psychological and visible physical phenomena. In both ancient literature and art, the portrayal of the development, the breaking out, and the aftermath of conflicts, and of bodies in conflict in particular, remains popular throughout antiquity. The two media, though, find different ways of representing conflict, while being in dialogue with each other at the same time. While literature, for instance, can more easily depict the invisible, psychological side of conflicts, a sense of the physical existence of those involved in a conflict fully comes to the fore once bodies are torn apart, injured, or killed.

In our workshop, we want to discuss what role the human body played in the conceptualisation and representation of conflict in the Roman imperial period as well as the interplay between literary and artistic approaches to representing the human body in conflict. To what extent do conflicts stem from physical contacts or invisible, emotional processes, and how do these find physical expression in literature and art once a conflict has broken out? How were different conflicts (of interest) in imperial literature and visual art specifically expressed in images of the body? How do literature and visual art of the imperial period depict bodies in conflict and what similarities and differences do we find between different media? How do the depictions of mythical and real conflicts relate to each other?

Our aim is to bring together colleagues from the fields of archaeology and classical philology and, on the basis of these and similar questions, to jointly achieve a better understanding of corporeality and its representation in the aforementioned context.

PROGRAMME

10:00 Introduction

Burkhard Emme, Anke Walter

10:20 Bodies in Conflict with God: Claudius Marius Victorius and the Epic Tradition

Thomas Kuhn-Treichel

11:05–11:30 Coffee break

11:30 Amazons on the Battlefield of Love and Death

Christian Russenberger

12:15 The Hero-Warrior's Thousand Bodies: Polymorphous Heroism and Heroic Otherness in Roman Imperial Epic

Helen Lovatt

13:00–14:30 Lunch break

14:30 *Corpus* and Related Terms in Lucan

Martin Dinter

15:15 The Physiognomy of Defeat: Severed Heads, Torn Hair, and Despondent Faces in Roman Battle Representations

Stephan Faust

16:00–16:30 Coffee break

16:30 The Seven against Thebes in Statius' *Thebaid* and Roman Imperial Art

Burkhard Emme, Anke Walter

17:00 Concluding Discussion

Conference Dinner

ABSTRACTS

Thomas Kuhn-Treichel

Heidelberg

Bodies in Conflict with God: Claudius Marius Victorius and the Epic Tradition

Conflicts can affect the body even if there is no physical interaction involved. This can be seen already in the Homeric epics, where certain formulaic expressions, esp. those denoting a ‘loosening’ of the limbs, occur both in cases of physical and of purely verbal conflicts, thus reflecting the psychosomatic dimension of conflicts. As far as physical conflicts are concerned, the expressions can be compared to archaic and early classical sculpture (e. g., in the East pediment of the temple of Aphaia). This paper will take the Homeric epics as a background for a discussion of a much later epic, which stands in a very different cultural background: the Latin biblical epic *Alethia*, a retelling of Genesis 1–19 written by Claudius Marius Victorius in the fifth century CE. The *Alethia* depicts especially some conflicts between characters and God, which by their very nature cannot involve visible physical interaction, with a strong focus on their bodily effects. E.g., it is narrated in detail how God punishes Cain with physical trembling because he has sinned against him by killing Abel; another example is the Pharaoh, who is punished with torpor when he wants to take Sara as his wife. The cases from Claudius Marius Victorius can be compared to Homer in that they emphasize the bodily effects of immaterial conflicts, but the comparison also reveals far-reaching differences, which bespeak the works’ different cultural contexts: while the cases in Homer reflect basic psychosomatic reactions, to which early Greek texts are very attentive, Claudius Marius Victorius, based on the exegetic tradition, constructs complex relations between sin and punishment; in this way, he integrates the bodily reactions into a theological system, which would be probably very difficult to express in material art.

Christian Russenberger

Rostock

Amazons on the Battlefield of Love and Death

In early Imperial love poetry, the myth of Amazons fighting Greeks is frequently used as a motif of *militia amoris*, the „warfare of love.“ The violent confrontation serves as a metaphor for fundamental modes of behaviour of young men and women on the „battlefield of love.“ In my contribution to the workshop, I aim to demonstrate that the fight between Amazons and Greeks was employed in a similar manner also in early Imperial visual art. However, the artists faced the challenge that the violent and deadly aspects of the subject were less easily concealed in visual media compared to literary media. While artists tried to overcome this disadvantage through iconographic adjustments, this often resulted in unsatisfactory outcomes, ultimately rendering a convincing transfer of the subject as a metaphor for the „warfare of love“ from the literary to the visual domain largely unsuccessful. This serves as a vivid example of the challenges that can arise when attempting to transfer the metaphorical potential of physical conflict from the realm of literature to the visual arts. In contrast, the use of the violent myth of Amazons fighting Greeks as a metaphor for female death in sepulchral art equally highlights the limited transferability of the same theme from the visual to the literary domain in a different context: In this case, the subject proved highly fruitful in visual media but could only be utilized with difficulty and in a less convincing manner in literary form.

In der frühkaiserzeitlichen Liebesdichtung wird die kriegerische Auseinandersetzung zwischen Amazonen und Griechen verschiedentlich als Motiv der *militia amoris* verwendet. Die gewaltsame Auseinandersetzung des Mythos dient als Metapher zur Veranschaulichung grundlegender Verhaltensweisen junger Männer und Frauen auf dem ‚Schlachtfeld der Liebe‘. In meinem Beitrag zum Workshop möchte ich zeigen, dass die Amazonomachie auch in der frühkaiserzeitlichen Bildkunst als Metapher für den ‚Liebeskampf‘ verwendet wurde.

Die bildenden Künstler standen allerdings vor dem Problem, dass sich die gewaltsamen bzw. tödlichen Aspekte des Themas in den visuellen Medien weniger leicht ausblenden ließen als in den literarischen Medien. Zwar waren die Künstler darum bemüht, diesen Nachteil durch ikonographische Anpassungen zu überwinden. Dies führte jedoch zu wenig befriedigenden Ergebnissen, so dass ein überzeugender Transfer aus dem literarischen in den visuellen Bereich letztlich als weitgehend gescheitert betrachtet werden muss. Es handelt sich mithin um ein anschauliches Beispiel für die Probleme, die sich beim Versuch ergeben können, das metaphorische Potential einer körperlichen Auseinandersetzung aus dem Bereich der Literatur in die Bildkunst zu übertragen. – Im Vergleich dazu lässt die Verwendung der Amazonomachie als Metapher für weibliches Sterben in der Sepulchralkunst ebenso deutlich die beschränkte Übertragbarkeit derselben Thematik aus dem visuellen in den literarischen Bereich nachvollziehen: In diesem Fall handelt es sich um eine Verwendung des Mythos, die in den Bildmedien überaus fruchtbar war, in literarischer Form dagegen nur mit Mühe und auf wenig überzeugende Weise eingesetzt werden konnte.

Helen Lovatt

Nottingham

The Hero-Warrior's Thousand Bodies: Polymorphous Heroism and Heroic Otherness in Roman Imperial Epic

This paper looks at the plurality and complexity of embodied heroic experience in Roman epic, in comparison with representations of heroic otherness in art. Theories of 'monomyth' like Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces* flatten out the differences between heroic bodies, presentations, ethnicities and experiences, and this 'formula' for 'successful' narrative based around conflict needs opening out to the complex and varied nature of embodiment, even within the relatively limited set of texts in imperial Latin epic (focusing on Ovid to Silius, with a particular emphasis on Statius' *Thebaid*).

Statius has a particular interest in unusual bodies or extreme bodily experiences, drawing on predecessors, especially Ovid and Lucan: short warriors, gigantic warriors, feminine, hypermasculine, young, old, dark, pale, disintegrating heroes, sublimating heroes, beastly, divinised, aquatic, hellish. The idea of death in a thousand shapes, wounds or forms on the battlefield emphasises the polymorphous nature, the distorting transformations of war on bodies. Just as Ovidian elegy includes all types of women, epic death includes all types of mortal bodies in its predatory gaze. Meanwhile, the multiplicitous nature of different heroic bodies leads to paradox, othering, an aesthetic of the freakish or spectacular. The paper explores connections with representations of heroic otherness in art and/or of non-normative bodies in Roman spectacle and Roman imperial historiography.

Martin Dinter

King's College London

***Corpus* and Related Terms in Lucan**

Lucan's epic is brimming with body imagery. By tracing the word *corpus* as well as the (unpoetic) cadaver in Lucan's epic my paper will examine how Lucan transgresses boundaries by employing (dead) bodies and parts thereof outside or beyond their usual spheres. He thus creates a world littered with corpses, which is simultaneously built of them. This in turn embodies – in the sense of supplying a body - the cosmos and creates a manifestation of Stoic *sympatheia*. Discussing select passages will allow me to explore the ramifications of Lucan's use of body vocabulary.

Stephan Faust

Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

The Physiognomy of Defeat: Severed Heads, Torn Hair, and Despondent Faces in Roman Battle Representations

In my paper I will concentrate on the heads of Rome's enemies in historical art of the Imperial age by analysing three recurrent motifs: the presentation of severed heads by victorious soldiers, the violent treatment of the captives' hair, and the facial expressions of the defeated. In order to investigate the semantics of heads in images of conflict, aspects like iconographic traditions, narrative functions, emotional effects, as well as ethnological and archaeological parallels shall be addressed.

Burkhard Emme

Freie Universität Berlin

Anke Walter

Newcastle / BAK Fellow 2024

The Seven against Thebes in Statius' *Thebaid* and Roman Imperial Art

Throughout antiquity, the city of Thebes is a city of conflict: on the Athenian tragic stage, Thebes represents the 'other', the place of inherited guilt and endless conflict, violence, and self-destruction. Thebes is turned inwards, as the son, Oedipus, kills his father and marries his mother, and as his twin sons, out of jealousy and undying hatred, kill each other, dragging the city of Argos into their deadly conflict. In Flavian Rome, this myth comes to new prominence in Statius' *Thebaid*. Subsequently, figures from the myth of Thebes also start appearing on a small number of high-quality sarcophagus reliefs from Rome and Athens.

The – surprisingly understudied – coexistence of these representations of the Seven against Thebes in literature and art provides a very fertile ground for exploring the way both media deal with one of the most brutal conflicts of ancient myth: with the complex psychological motivations of the conflict, with their corporeal expressions, as well as with how the human body negotiates the tensions between the invisible and the visible. By closely comparing the literary and visual representation of individual figures of the Theban myth and the effects the Theban conflict has on their minds and bodies, we will aim to shed new light on the interplay between the different representative strategies of literature and art in the imperial age and on their cultural and political implications.

MIT **KONFLIKTEN** UMGEHEN

Jahresthema 2023/24