In Memoriam Apostoli Pauli: Plato, Paul, and the Body Politic in Galatians[1]

Jeffrey Keiser, *McGill University*

Some say that [the body (sōma)] is a tomb (sēma) of the soul since the soul is buried for the time being, and also because by it the soul signifies (sēmainei) whatever it signifes (sēmainē), for which reason it is rightly called sōma. It seems most likely to me, however, that the circle of Orpheus established the name sōma, because, while the soul is being judged for whatever reasons it is being judged, it has this peribolos to preserve it (sōzētai)—an image of prison. And this is what the body is for the soul, as the very name sōma indicates, until the soul repays whatever is owed. Not even a single letter needs to be changed
– Plato, *Cratylus* 400c

Hereafter let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body
– Galatians 6:17

A once-standard account of the relationship between body and soul in Western thought can be summarized, at the risk of flagrant oversimplification, in four steps. (1) If archaic Greeks and ancient Hebrews ever associated human beings with any particular part of the human constitution (as we tend to understand it) it was the visible body, δέμας in Greek or בשר in Hebrew, usually deployed synecdochically as representing the whole. The Greek ψυχή and the Hebrew נפש are similarly equivalent at this stage, both being used for *life* in the broadest sense but especially for *this present life.* Where an afterlife comes into view it is literally a shadow of antemortem existence. Thus the Homeric ψυχή only survives the death of the body as a mere *shade* of its former self, recognizable but insubstantial. Σῶμα in Homeric usage always designates a corpse. (2) These ideas were radically transformed, in the Greek world, by the emergence of the σῶμα-σῆμα formula and the identification of ψυχή as the superior partner in an uneasy forced merger, leading eventually to a thoroughgoing and pessimistic dualism in which σῶμα came to be maligned and ψυχή beatified as the immortal seat of human identity. Jews meanwhile retained the holistic anthropology of their ancestors, strengthened by developing beliefs concerning the future resurrection of the dead and brought to its logical conclusion in the earliest Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection. A few hellenized Jews like Philo of Alexandria occasionally slipped into Greek-style dualism, but Paul remains in step with the majority in his view of human beings as animated bodies rather than incarcerated souls. (3) The early church fathers were Greeks, however, and in their increasing reliance on the categories of Hellenic philosophy they could not help but understand Paul's anthropology in terms that were essentially foreign to the apostle himself, leading to a

---

1. This paper was presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, joint Greco-Roman Religions/SAMR Session, Sunday, November 20, 2011, San Francisco, California. I owe a note of gratitude to Jodi Magness for her well-reasoned and carefully researched response, which I will take into account in future versions.

long-lasting but illegitimate marriage of Greek (primarily Platonist) philosophy and Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead. For as long as this marriage endured (and it still persists in some quarters) the vast majority of Christians were functioning dualists. (4) The authentic, holistic Pauline perspective was only recovered by critical biblical scholars in the early- to mid-twentieth century.

The story breaks up at this point because the those most directly responsible for popularizing the recovery also tended to disagree over its implications.[2] Yet with few exceptions or qualifications they endorsed (and continue to endorse) Rudolf Bultmann's oft-quoted thesis to the effect that "one does not *have* a σῶμα**,** one *is* a σῶμα."[3] Bultmann surmounted the difficulty posed by Pauline usages where σῶμα seems to designate the physical body *per se* by arguing that in a number of these contexts it is interchangeable with a personal pronoun so that it can be translated merely 'I' (or whatever pronoun fits the context).[4] Although Gal 6:17 appeared in his initial summary of such usages, he did not discuss the passage further, nor did his students and followers adequately probe its implications for Paul's anthropology, seeming content for the most part to identify Paul's στίγματα as the marks left on his body by the trials and suffering of his apostleship.

The lingering difficulties posed by this and other similarly recalcitrant passages prompted a number of post-Bultmannian scholars to adopt the still-popular convention of contrasting Paul's 'neutral' or 'normal' deployment of anthropological terms to his more 'theological' or 'comprehensive' usages.[5] This strategy accounts for the variability of his

---

2. Compare Rudolf Bultmann's existentialist reserve toward Paul's "mythological teaching on resurrection" to Oscar Cullman's insistence that *both* body and soul are subject to death in the hope that the *whole person* will finally be resurrected in a spiritual (= incorruptible ≠ fleshly) body. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament,* Vol. 1 (trans. Kendrick Grobel; New York: Scribner, 1951) §17.1–3, 192–203. Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead," in ed. Krister Stendahl, *Immortality and Resurrection: Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Currents of Thought* (New York: MacMillan, 1965) 23–30. Cf. J.A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM, 1952) 31–32, n.1. Like Bultmann, Robinson found the significance of σῶμα in usages where it appears to designate a particular relationship. He differed from Bultmann only insofar as he perceived that relationship not as one of man to himself but of man to God, a strategy that underwrote his agnosticism regarding the physicality of resurrection bodies: σῶμα "fulfills its essence by being subject to the Spirit, not by being material or immaterial." Ernst Käsemann ("On Paul's Anthropology" in idem, *Perspectives on Paul* [trans. Margaret Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969] 21) affirmed Bultmann's view that Paul's anthropological termini generally apply to human existence as whole, considered under its various aspects, but he insisted on the vulgar corporeality of human beings in their freighted relationships with each other and the chaotic forces of the cosmos. His trademark emphasis on the apocalyptic character of Paul's anthropology is still with us. See e.g. Alan F. Segal, "Paul's Thinking about Resurrection in Its Jewish Context," *NTS* 44.3 (1998) 415.
3. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neun Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984) §17.1, 195.
4. Bultmann, *Theology* §17.1, 193–194. For criticism of this approach, see Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology, with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (SNTS Monographs 29; Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 29–33.
5. Robinson (*The Body,* 27, 31) contrasted σῶμα in a "purely neutral sense" meaning "the external man, 'the body'" to σάρξ, "meaning man in rebellion against God." In its 'non-neutral' sense, **"**σῶμα *stands for*

language by establishing a hierarchy of significance whereby any usage that cannot be comfortably accomodated to an holistic anthropology without sacrificing clarity or consensus simply remains 'neutral' and can be summarized as such without further ado.[6] As Ernst Käsemann already recognized, however, it does not overcome the contradiction inherent in his *Doktorvaters* own demonstration of the principle that "Paul's theology is, at the same time, anthropology" and vice versa. Bultmann's method implies, on this critique, that at least some of Paul's anthropological statements are *not,* in fact, theological statements.[7]

---

man, in the solidarity of creation, as made for God" (Robinson's italics). Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1969), 173: "The cosmological (κόσμος) and anthropological (σῶμα) concepts are neutral in themselves. The σῶμα can be ψυκικόν or πνευματικόν." Günther Bornkamm, *Paul* (trans. D.M.G. Stalker; New York; Evanton, Ill.: Harper & Row, 1971), 130: "The most comprehensive, and theologically important [anthropological term for Paul] is 'body' (*sōma*). Admittedly this is not obvious everywhere. Quite often 'body' has its normal meaning…" More recently, see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) §3.2–4, 55–73. Dunn states that the undisputed Pauline letters deploy σῶμα more than 50 times "in what we might call the normal usage, that is, in reference to the human body of everyday existence" (55). Subsequently, a venn diagram represents "flesh," labeled 'negative', overlapping with "body," labeled 'neutral' (72). Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Legacy* (trans. M. Eugene Boring; Grand Rapids, Mich.: BakerAcademic, 2005) 495–498. Schnelle differentiates between "σῶμα as a *neutral* designation of the human physical constitution," "σῶμα in a *negative* sense," and "σῶμα in a *positive* sense as Paul's comprehensive expression for the human self." He also comments on the notion that "a human being both is a body and has body," yet with no attempt to reconcile the tension between these two perspectives.

6. Dunn (*Theology of Paul the Apostle,* §3.2, 54–58) deploys two different and irreconcilable methods of classifying Paul's anthropological terms. He describes the distinction between partitive (Greek) and aspective (Hebraic) conceptions of the human being as having "some merit" but hardly adequate to grasp the diversity and complexity of the Greek debate or the influence of Hellenism on diaspora Judaism (cf. David E. Aune, "Human Nature and Ethics in Hellenistic Philosophical Traditions and Paul: Some Issues and Problems," in ed. Troels Engberg Pedersen, *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995] 298–299). Nevertheless, he indicates that the "more 'partitive' Greek conception" of σῶμα is reflected in the LXX and the non-Pauline NT, tacitly signalling that Paul's own usage corresponds to the more aspective Hebraic conception. Thereafter he switches to a spectrographic model in which "the focus on physicality is only one end of the spectrum." Usages at the "much richer" end of the spectrum receive preferential treatment, thus the meaning 'body plus more' occupies a controlling position in his analysis of σῶμα in Paul's letters. From this vantage point it is easy to see why he never totally abandons the aspective model; it still proves useful at the narrower end of the spectrum where one must presume that the 'whole' is presupposed though partially excluded from the frame. Despite these criticisms I retain Dunn's emphasis on the social dimension of human corporeality, which I trace back to Käsemann (See above n. 2, with further discussion below p. 4).

7. Bultmann, *Theology 1,* §17.1, 191. Käsemann, "On Paul's Anthropology," 12. Cf., more recently, Theo K. Heckel, "Body and Soul in Saint Paul," in ed. John P. Wright and Paul Potter, *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) 117–131, esp. 118–119 for criticism of Bultmann's attempt to dispose of passages that did not fit his interpretation of Paul's anthropology.

Käsemann went on to state that the problem could not be confined to exegesis alone without trivializing the larger hermeneutical issue. He objected to the very idea of a purportedly neutral baseline—σῶμα *qua* corporeality—from which Paul intuited the possibility of different ways of being,[8] and which could therefore be shunted to the background of the exegetical process once these possibilities had been introduced and the 'real' work of elucidating Paul's anthropology had begun. He defined corporeality instead as "the nature of man in his need to participate in creatureliness and in his *capacity for communication* in the widest sense, that is to say, in his relationship to a world with which he is confronted on each several occasion."[9]

Käsemann's emphasis on the communicative capacity of human corporeality hearkened back to one of the earliest definitions of σῶμα to have come down to us: "Some say that it is a tomb … because by it the soul signifies (σημαίνει) whatever it signifes (σημαίνῃ), for which reason it is rightly called "σῆμα" (Plato, *Cratylus* 400c). In retrospect, Käsemann also anticipated the 'turn to the body' that swept through the humanities during the last quarter of the twentieth century and continues apace today.[10] In what follows I offer little in the way of Foucauldian analysis, Bahktinian carnivalesque, or Bourdieu-esque habitus.[11] I merely propose that Plato and Paul share more in common in their attention to the *function* of the human body in the *present* than has previously been recognized.[12] In order to demonstrate that this is a reasonable proposal, however, I must rescue Plato from the theologians.

---

8. See Bultmann, *Theology* §17.2, 195–198, concerning "the possibility of having one's self in hand or of losing this control and being at the mercy of a power not one's own." One must momentarily concede Bultmann's thesis and substitute "body" for "self" in order to understand the progression of his argument, the underlying idea being that both inner control and outer subjugation involve the body as something that is always already given and not (according to Greek anthropology as Bultmann regarded it) as a secondary addition that merely clings to one's real self. Control of one's *body* would theoretically be experienced indiscriminately as control of one's *self,* from this perspective, whether it were exercised from within or imposed from without.
9. Käsemann, "Anthropology," 21.
10. So much so that one eminent scholar of Early Christianity has recently issued a call for a renewed look at the soul. See François Bovon, "The Soul's Comeback: Immortality and Resurrection in Early Christianity," *HTR* 103.4 (2010) 387–406.
11. For recent studies of Paul's body language that deploy the theories of Michel Foucault and/or Pierre Bourdieu, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and the Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 139–205 and Jennifer Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 25–47.
12. That they differ with respect to the question of bodily existence in *l'au-delà* is axiomatic, as indicated by the fact that the σῶμα-σῆμα formula is routinely introduced in contexts concerning Paul's views on resurrection, especially with respect to the Corinthian correspondence. In addition to the discussions cited above (n. 14) see Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 177; M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, eds. *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1995) 452; J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 224–226.

It is a fact of scholarship on Christian origins and theology that Plato's full definition of σῶμα in the *Cratylus* is routinely ignored in favour of the sibilant short form, σῶμα-σῆμα, which is often accompanied by the most perfunctory analyses.[13] Readers of NT introductions, commentaries, theologies, and monographs encounter it as a 'catchy Greek phrase', a 'tag', or a 'classical pun',[14] characterizations that are not altogether inaccurate to the extent that Plato's etymologies in the *Cratylus* are generally thought to be tongue-in-cheek, but which have a markedly different effect in the context of scholarship on Paul than on Plato. Paul's view of the body, we are *wrongly* led to believe, is more serious, nuanced, and complex than that of either Plato or the Middle Academy.[15]

I am not the first person to question the received wisdom, but my approach is different.[16] Instead of focusing on exegetical or doctrinal issues, I ask how a closer look at

---

13. Heinz-Horst Schrey, "Leib/Leiblichkeit," *TRE* 20 (1990) 641: "Die orphisch-platonische Anschauung vom Leib als Kerker oder Grab der Seele (σῶμα – σῆμα) ist dem Neuen Testament ebenso fremd wie die manichäische Identifizierung des Leibes mit dem Bösen." E.P. Sanders, "Paul," in ed. John Barclay and John Sweet, *Early Christian Thought in Its Jewish Context* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 122: "People who held this kind of [body-soul] dualism often regarded the body as bad, 'the tomb of the soul' in a famous phrase (*sōma – sēma*). Thereafter Sanders devotes a few sentences to Philo as a Jewish representative of such dualism. Similarly cursory discussions elsewhere are cited below (nn. 14, 12). An older but still insightful analysis of Philo's dualism can be found in E.R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (Amsterdam: Philo, 1969) 370–415, esp. 379–380.

14. The view that Greek anthropological dualism could be summed up by the σῶμα-σῆμα formula and rejected over against the 'unitary' biblical view of the human being was described as a "gross oversimplification" by D.E.H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964) 31–32. Whiteley then summarized "the Greek doctrine of man" in a single paragraph, contrasted it with "the Hebrew doctrine of Man," and located "St. Paul's unitary view of man" squarely in the latter category (34–38)—surely an equally gross oversimplification. Although he admitted that Paul occasionally deployed dualistic language, he dismissed such instances as 'peripheral', 'rare', and 'non-normal' (38–39). Cf. Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 277; Dunn, *Theology,* §2.4, 39 n. 5; idem, *Christianity in the Making, Volume 1: Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009) §32.5, 825 n. 325; N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 145; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an der Korinther* (4 vols.; EKK 7/1–4; Düsseldorf: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991–2001) 2.14–15.

15. As in Hans Dieter Betz, "The Concept of the 'Inner Human Being' (ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος) in the Anthropology of Paul," *NTS* 46.3 (2000) 340: "…while rejecting the Middle-Platonic dualism of an immortal soul imprisoned
or entombed in a material body, Paul saw the need to work out an anthropology that could answer the questions raised." The assumption that Plato's anthropology remained stable throughout his career and continued to hold sway thereafter through the formative years of earliest Christianity has been challenged by Aune "Human Nature," 292–297 and Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 7–15. Their criticisms have not altered the stereotyped way in which NT scholars tend to deploy the σῶμα-σῆμα formula, including even Aune, "Anthropological Duality in the Eschatology of 2 Cor 4:16–5:10," in ed. Troels Engberg Pedersen, *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism* Divide (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 2001) 221.

16. See Cornelia J. de Vogel, "The Sōma-Sēma Formula: Its Function in Plato and Plotinus Compared to

fifth-century Athenian funerary culture might impact our understanding of Plato's remarks in *Cratylus* 400c. My procedure involves four steps. First, a discussion of Christian Sourvinou-Inwood's concepts of memory survival and social persona in archaic funerary monuments provides a theoretical lens through which to look at Athenian funerary monuments in Plato's time. Second, drawing on selected examples from Athenian white-ground lekythoi, I argue that these vessels illustrate an ongoing perception of tombs as σᾶματα or signs that preserved the memory deceased persons and articulated their ongoing social persona, with implications for Plato's metaphor of the body as a σῆμα. Third, I discuss two examples of Athenian family tombs, or peribolos tombs as they are commonly called, with a view toward rethinking Plato's metaphors of the body as a peribolos and a prison. Finally, I conclude with some remarks on how this relates to Paul's body language in Galatians.

1. Memory Survival and Social Persona in Archaic Funerary Monuments

The use of painted vases as grave monuments was common in the eighth century B.C.E. but declined radically over the following centuries as inscribed monuments and sculpted images became progressively more common. Sourvinou-Inwood attributes this shift to several factors, including an emergent concern for "memory survival" marked by the increasing use of μνῆμα to designate grave monuments, a usage that is absent from the Homeric poems yet consistent with the ongoing use of σῆμα. Whereas the occupants of graves lacking epitaphs survived in memory only as long as knowledge of their identity persisted in the collective consciousness of the community, inscribed monuments were literally self-preserving. In the majority of cases such monuments served both indexical and symbolic functions; that is, as a σᾶματα or signs of the deceased they normally testified to the presence of the buried remains of the deceased and, in their symbolic function, to the fact that the living persona of the deceased had been succeeded by his or her "new persona," articulated with greater or lesser specificity by the monument itself:[17]

Christian Writers," in ed. H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus, *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought* (London: Varorum, 1981) 79–95 and Rein Ferwerda, "The Meaning of the Word ΣΩΜΑ in Plato's Cratylus 400c," Hermes 113.3 (1985) 266–279.

17. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *'Reading' Greek Death to the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) 112–115 (on the distinction and relationship between the indexical and symbolic functions of signs); 131–140 (on the definition of σῆμα and its relationship to μνῆμα); 278–279 (on the decreasing use of vases as grave markers over the Archaic period).

> Consequently, it was inevitably to the grave monument that was transferred all 'reference' to the deceased which had previously been associated with the corpse/bones; and, after the separation of the deceased from the world of the living, this meant the reference to his new persona, and especially his memory, the remembrance of his living persona. It follows that, when the burial was sealed off, and the grave monument erected, this became the (metonymically derived) symbol for the deceased's new persona, and most emphatically for that part of his new persona which existed in the world of the living, his memory, the continued existence of his persona in the memory of the living.[18]

Importantly, however, a σῆμα could also perform this function *independently* of a strict indexical relationship between monument and corpse; that is, *whether or not a grave actually contained the remains of the deceased.* What was critical from the standpoint of the funerary ritual was the sealing off of the grave or cenotaph, which sealed off or symbolically neutralized the physical remains of the deceased and marked the exclusion of their ψυχή from the world of the living—a completed rite of passage.

The signficance of these observations is twofold. First, the primary purpose of the σῆμα in the Archaic period was not always or exclusively to protect the contents of the grave, since in some cases the grave could be empty, but to signify on the one hand that the proper rites had been conducted, and increasingly, on the other hand, to preserve the memory of the deceased in the world of the living. Second, because the σῆμα stood metonymically for the *whole person*—body, soul, and the rest—it was arguably the *whole person* whose memory it sought to preserve. With the physical remains of the deceased sealed off, the σῆμα itself functioned as a 'body' with which the living interacted in a variety of ritually defined ways and through which the ongoing social persona of the deceased was articulated, whether it took the form of an idealized statue or even a non-iconographical representation such as a stele:

> A *sema* can be the metonymic sign of the deceased symbolizing his social persona as a memory after death without representing that persona iconographically; such iconographical representation is only one of the options for the grave monument; and when that option was taken further options were open as to the greater or lesser definition of that persona. The perceived (by the ancients) relationship between the *sema* and the dead person was variable within wide parameters.[19]

I now turn to the question of whether grave markers in the fifth century continued to perform functions similar to those of their archaic predecessors or whether changes in burial practices influenced by sumptuary legislation and other factors also exerted pressure on the way such markers were perceived. White-ground lekythoi present an ideal test case both because they were used as visible grave markers and because they were

---

18. Sourvinou-Inwood, *'Reading' Greek Death,* 120.
19. Sourvinou-Inwood, *'Reading' Greek Death,* 229.

geographically and chronologically limited mainly to fifth-century Attica and the surrounding regions. They were made in Athens for Athenians, as John Oakley remarks, "so there is no question for whom their imagery was meant."[20]

2. An Embarrassment of Riches

The absence of sculptured Attic grave monuments and stelae from the archaeological record beginning sometime in the late sixth or early fifth-century and lasting roughly until the start of the Peloponnesian War in 431 B.C.E. is usually attributed to legislation restricting the time and resources that could be dedicated to erecting tombs, as well as the extent of their ornamentation (Cicero, *de Leg.* 2.26). Production of white-ground lekythoi peaked during this period, so these vessels provide our best evidence for Athenian funerary culture at the time. Many of them show scenes at the grave in which lekythoi and/or other earthenware vessels appear in gift baskets carried by vistors, on the steps of a tomb or, in some cases, atop the tomb monument itself. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the ongoing display of vases at classical gravesites.

First, a lekythos by the hand of an artist known as the Phiale Painter (ca. 435–430 B.C.E.) depicts two figures at a grave, both females.[21] On the left stands a woman holding a hare; on the right a Thracian nurse kneels in a posture of mourning, head tilted back, left hand grasping her head, right hand raised with fingers gesturing toward a large loutrophoros atop an egg-shaped tumulus that separates the two figures. Oakley identifies the woman with the pet hare as the deceased mistress for whom the old nurse mourns.[22] If this is correct, then the significance of the scene is twofold. (1) The deceased is depicted *as she was in life,* that is, as a full-fledged human figure with attributes that characterize her social persona and not as a generic, winged shade (εἴδωλον).[23] (2) Although the scene suggests that the deceased is somehow present at the tomb, the actions of the mourning nurse are directed, *and deictically they direct the viewer,* toward the monument itself—the vase. The vase is now the sign of the deceased in the world of the living.[24]

---

20. John Howard Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens* (Cambridge Studies in Classical Art and Iconography; Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 231.
21. Athens, National Musuem 19355.
22. Oakley, *Picturing Death,* 158–164; fig. 123.
23. White-ground lekythoi from the mid- to late-fifth century regularly depict εἴδωλα, but only rarely is it possible to determine whether an individual εἴδωλον represents, or is directly associated with, the deceased (e.g., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989.281.72). Oakley, *Picturing Death,* pl. VIII; 212–213.
24. The interpretation is complicated by the twin problems of whether white-ground lekythoi regularly depict the deceased in "visit to the grave" scenes and how to identify the deceased in any given scene. The figure whom Oakley singles out on the Phiale Painter's lekythos may represent a living relation, though several compositional features indicate otherwise. 'Reading' the scene from left to right, both the downward gaze of the woman with the hare and the symmetry between her gently angled right hand and the hare resting in her left hand draw implicit, converging lines. The lines formed by these gestures converge to

Second, a lekythos on display in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts depicts a bearded man with a staff, kneeling before a sarcophagus in what appears to be a ritual pose.[25] On the opposite side of the sarcophagus stands a beardless youth wrapped in a cloak, who is normally identified as the deceased. A two-stepped base supports the sarcophagus, which is topped by a pediment sculpture showing a wrestling match. Two sculptures of nude atheletes serve as *acroteria,* one on the left holding a strigil and another on the right holding a spear. In the background on either side of the sarcophagus hang a discus and a lyre, further indications that the deceased was an ephebe. "Although individual elements of the structure can be paralleled," according to Kurtz, "the composite structure is probably fantastical."[26] Like the Phiale Painter, then, the artist who composed this scene plays with the referential character of the vessel, portraying both the social persona of the deceased and his ideal σῆμα. The lekythos thus performs a double metonymic role as a sign of the deceased and as a *sign of the sign* of the deceased.

When placed on the surface of a grave, white-ground lekythoi became part of the σῆμα itself.[27] As such they could signify how the deceased should be remembered or, equally importantly, *that the deceased had been remembered:*

---

point toward the tumulus—suggesting that she is, in fact, the occupant of the grave—and from there to the abdomen of the bereaved Thracian nurse, the seat of her grief. The nurse's body, in turn, angles upward and outward from the tumulus, directing attention to her expressive acts of mourning. Here too her gestures form converging lines, which in this case point to the loutrophoros rather than the tumulus. The scene therefore establishes a programmatic visual relationship between the deceased and the grave, on the one hand, and between the mourner and the monument, on the other hand, depicting precisely the sequence of events described by Sourvinou-Inwood, wherein the body of the deceased ceases to function as a metonymic 'sign' once the grave is sealed and all reference to the deceased is subsequently transferred to the σῆμα itself. The image on the lekythos functions, in effect, as a sign of a sign.

25. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 01.8080, with discussion in Sourvinou-Inwood, *'Reading' Greek Death,* 324, n. 99; Donna C. Kurtz, *Athenian White Lekythoi: Patterns and Painters* (Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology; Oxford: Clarendon 1975)*,* 210; pl. 31.1; Oakley, *Picturing Death,* 192; 195, figs. 156–157.

26. Above, n. 24.

27. Athens, National Museum, 1935; R.C. Bosanquet, "Some Early Funeral Lekythoi," *JHS* 19 (1899) 169–172; pl. II; Fairbanks, *Athenian Lekythoi,* vol. 2 (University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series; New York: MacMillan, 1904) 205–207 (C.V.22); Zürich, University, 2518; Kurtz, *Athenian White Lekythoi,* 224; pl. 51.3. In both cases lekythoi are draped with gifts (wreaths and ribbons) that normally adorn the monument itself. The fragile nature of such displays is indicated, however, by scenes showing inevitably broken or overturned vases on tombs. For a list of such instances, see Kurtz, *Athenian White Lekythoi,* 38, n. 4.

> Probably these lekythoi were left standing on the steps of the tomb monument, informing the world of the living that the family had performed *tà nomizómena,* the proper rites. If this was the case the dummy was not strictly speaking an *entáphion,* not put into the grave, but used at rites performed after the burial…[28]

Although evidence that white-ground lekythoi were sometimes broken or burned rather than deposited intact either in or on the grave complicates this picture,[29] in general their semiotic functions seem to have gone hand in glove with their practical functions. What they signified could vary widely within certain parameters, but they were much more than mere earthen vessels, and their symbolism had at least as much to do with the lives of the living as with the putative needs of the dead.[30]

Rereading Plato's comments in *Cratylus* 400c from the perspective afforded by the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that his first two definitions of σῶμα correspond to the two main functions of funerary monuments in Plato's own day. At the most basic level the body is an *index* of the soul; it is a σῆμα because it visibly marks the place where the soul is 'buried'. As Plotinus would later state: "since we have *seen* the body and know that it is ensouled we say that it has a soul" (*Enn.* 4.3.30.43–45). Beyond that, however, the body also serves a much richer *symbolic* function; it is a σῆμα because by it the soul *signifies* (σημαίνει). Just as a tomb preserves the memory of the deceased and articulates his or her social persona in the world of the living, the body preserves the memory of the soul's past and articulates the soul's social persona in the world of generation and corruption. How these two functions relate and even blur together in Plato's definition of the body as a peribolos and a prison is the subject to which I turn next.

3. Family Values

In an important article on Athenian family tombs, commonly referred to as peribolos tombs after the walls that normally enclose three or four sides of the burial plot, S.C. Humphreys commented on the markedly domestic character of representations on

---

28. Helle Salskov Roberts, "Pots for the Living, Pots for the Dead," in ed. Annette Rathje, Marjatta Nielsen, and
Bodil Bundgaard Rasmussen, *Pots for the Living, Pots for the Dead* (Acta Hyperborea 9; Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanem, 2002) 11. On *ta nomizomena* in general and white lekythoi in particular see Garland, *The Greek Way of Death,* 104–108.

29. Oakley, *Picturing Death,* 9. The difficulties associated with interpreting grave goods have been discussed by Ian Morris, *Death Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 103–127, although Morris' conclusions have not been widely accepted.

30. Lucian of Samosata was as attuned to this fact as any modern thanatologist when he opined that the practice of depositing objects in graves benefited the living more than the dead (*De luctu* 14–15).

Attic grave reliefs from the late-fifth century onwards.[31] Humphreys contrasted these representations to archaic funerary monuments, most of which were erected for children, young men who died in war, or adolescent girls who died before marriage—all individuals who suffered from 'memory deficiency' and whose monuments therefore 'spoke' to a wider community than the immediate family. Humphreys further suggested that the substitution of small, painted vases for sculptured monuments during the 50-year period prior to the start of the Peloponnesian War contributed to a narrowing radius of people whose attention could be claimed by tombs, now restricted mainly to family and kin groups. The domestic scenes which by the late-fifth century had come to dominate white-ground lekythoi retained their appeal long after the lekythoi themselves fell into disuse, but identifying the deceased in representations from these tombs is often difficult. Humphries attributes this to a new stress on family unity and a lack of concern to separate the living from the dead, but in fact the very question "which person is the deceased" betrays certain presuppositions concerning the priority of a person's identity as an individual versus a person's identity as a member of a group.

Corollary to Sourvinou-Inwood's theory that a σῆμα could function as a metonymic sign of the deceased *without representing that person iconographically*, iconographic representations could function as a metonymic signs *without representing the deceased as distinct individuals* or even at all. In such cases what was thought to be distinctive about the deceased—his or her social persona—could be articulated through iconography that emphasized social roles, group cohesion, and/or ideal traits. The memory quotient of any given individual could therefore vary in relation to the iconographic decisions of the family or kin group, just as in archaic commemorations it could vary in relation to the type of monument erected. More often than not the representations on Attic tombstones do not have a one-to-one relationship to the graves within the periboloi. Instead the interplay between images creates a complex web of relationships that sometimes defies strictly genealogical interpretation and thus presents considerable difficulties for modern interpreters. Wendy Closterman cites the example of the family tomb of Hierocles at Rhamnous. An inscription on a fourth-century B.C.E. *naiskos* base asks the passer-by to "consider the [σῆμα] of five brothers,"[32] yet the base itself originally supported a relief showing the last of the five brothers to die, Hieron, and a woman named Lysippe, presumably his wife. The five sons of Hierocles are nowhere portrayed together, but each

31. S.C. Humphries, "Tombs and Tomb Cult in Ancient Athens: Tradition or Traditionalism?" *JHS* 100 (1980) 96–126. For a useful introduction to peribolos tombs, see Robert C. Garland, "A First Catalogue of Attic Peribolos Tombs," *ABSA* 77 (1982) 125–133, esp. 128 on the typical architectural outline. The term "peribolos tombs" is a modern title, as noted by Wendy E. Closterman, "Family Ideology and Family History: The Function of Funerary Markers in Classical Attic Peribolos Tombs, *AJA* 111 (2007) 633, n. 1. Nevertheless, it is an accurate description of a basic feature of such tombs.

32. *IG*2^{2} 13102a. I have replaced Closterman's translation of σῆμα as "monument" with the original Greek term.

appears in various groupings on different stelae. Clostermann concludes that "the [σῆμα] of five brothers must be the tomb as a whole."[33]

Elsewhere Clostermann notes that funerary markers do not always provide an accurate record of those interred in a tomb,[34] a phenomenon that sometimes had a disproportionate impact on women.[35] Only two women are represented in the Koroibos family tomb in the Kerameikos cemetery, a female slave and a seated woman identified by an inscription as "Hegeso, daughter of Proxenos." Closterman argues, however, that "in addition to functioning as a memorial to Hegeso as an individual, her idealized image later came to represent the qualities of the unnamed wives of the male descendants whose names were added to the rosette stele."[36] The memory quotient of these unnamed women is low with respect to their individual personalities, yet their social persona is articulated, in the context of the tomb as a whole, through the representation of a memorable individual whose image was thought to embody the traits of an ideal Athenian wife. The men of the family are not represented iconographically, in contrast, yet only their names are recorded on the rosette stele. Thus the stele functions not as an index of a specific body but as a symbol of the family's male line. As Closterman remarks:

> In the context of peribolos tombs, classical Attic funerary monuments had a stronger *ideological* than *documentary* function. Their primary role was to present a family portrait, rather than to serve as a repository for information about burial or a family's genealogical history. Instead of providing a complete record of those buried in the tomb, an easily navigable portrait of the individuals commemorated, or the intricacies of the family tree, the facade of a peribolos tomb conveyed an image of family solidarity as measured against the backdrop of an Athenian ideal.[37]

One could also say that classical Attic funerary monuments had a stronger *symbolic* than *indexical* function, and that these two functions varied according to changes in funerary practices and social ideology. Both the *variability* of these functions over time and the *priority* which Athenians seem to have given to the symbolic in the production and placement of tombstones during the late-fifth and most of the fourth century B.C.E. ought therefore to caution us against too quickly collapsing Plato's concept of the body as an *index* of the soul with the notion of the body as a *grave* of the soul. In fact, the metaphor of the body as a περίβολος provides sufficient latitude to conceive of the *place* of the soul's confinement less literally, in terms of *social location.* The key question in

---

33. Closterman, "Family Ideology," 641–642.
34. Closterman, "Family Ideology," 638–640.
35. Garland, "Catalogue" 132.
36. Closterman, "Family Ideology," 649 (my italics), following B. Schmaltz, *Griechische Grabreliefs* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983) 7–10.
37. Closterman, "Family Ideology," 651 (my italics).

this case is not whether the soul is buried in the body as in a grave, but rather how the body, as a περίβολος, is monumentalized.

4. Male and Female He Created Them

The title character of the *Timaeus* describes how the Demiurge, when creating the human being, enclosed the seed—the marrow to which various kinds of soul are bound (*Tim.* 73b–c)—in a stone-like περίβολος in order to preserve it (διασῴζων, *Tim.* 74a). The word διασῴζω arguably carries the same connotation here as when Isocrates' uses it in the sense of "keep in memory" in reference to an ancient Spartan cult at the tomb of Menelaos and Helen at Therapne (*Hel. enc.* 10.63; *LSJ* s.v.); in fact this usage commends itself if we take the idea of the soul's immortality seriously. Since the soul survives the death of the body, what the περίβολος preserves must be the *memory* of the soul's past, a memory that is articulated partly by the monuments that adorn it and partly by the symbolic actions of the soul within, including asceticism. The latter means of signifying provide a small measure of parity in what is otherwise a rigidly stratified system dominated by male paradigms of social interaction: philosopher, king, warrior, athlete, and so on.

Even the body is originally male, as a brief remark by Timaeus makes clear: "for those who were constructing us knew that women and the other beasts (!) would one day spring from men" (ὡς γάρ ποτε ἐξ ἀνδρῶν γυναῖκες καὶ τἆλλα θηρία γενήσοιντο, ἠπίσταντο οἱ συνιστάντες ἡμᾶς, *Timaeus* 76d). The grouping of women with "other beasts" here is consistent both with Timaeus' comments elsewhere, indicating that souls who fail in a past life may be transferred "into the form of a woman" (εἰς γυναικὸς φύσιν) or, worse yet, "into some such bestial nature" (εἴς τινα τοιαύτην … θήρειον φύσιν, *Timaeus* 42b–c; cf. 90e–91a), and with Socrates' remark that a soul shall never be implanted into the form of a beast in its first birth (μὴ φυτεῦσαι εἰς μηδεμίαν θήρειον φύσιν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ γενέσει, *Phaedrus* 248d). All of these statements presuppose the philosophical male body as the model from which all other forms decline, in an ontological hierarchy that reflects the social stratification evident, for example, in the Koroibos family tomb.

For Plato, to be bound to a body in *this* world, in which the barriers to upward mobility are prohibitive, is to be tied to a particular social location, able at times to see, hear, and even interact in certain limited ways with those above and on the outside but rarely able to join them as a peer. Plato's doctrine of metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls holds forth hope for a positive change of status in the *next* life and even for a kind of eschatological egalitarianism in which souls are unmarked by bodies and thus untethered from oppressive class structures, yet his view of this life remains inherently conservative: "we human beings are in a kind of prison and must neither free ourselves nor escape" (*Phaedo* 62b). To commit suicide is, in the first instance, to flout the system of cosmic justice, but also to destroy the *memory* of the past that is preserved

and signified by the περίβολος of the body—the very opposite of the *tendence* implied by the word διασῴζω (*Tim.* 74a), expected by Athenian society, and codified in Athenian law. In short, suicide is not only unlawful but impious (μὴ ὅσιον, *Phaedo* 62a). To the extent that anyone attempting to 'escape' their social location by killing the body risks incurring charges of malfeasance and impiety, the body can be construed as an image of a prison. This explains why, in the *Phaedrus,* Socrates criticizes the notion of an immortal living being having both a body and a soul joined for all time (*Phaedr.* 246d), not because the body is innately shameful and evil but because *it no longer serves a purpose when the soul in its cyclical revolutions finally beholds justice itself* (αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην, *Phaedr.* 247d).

For both Plato and Paul the body functions as a tomb, a sign, and an image of justice. Both men arguably view justice in terms of radical equality, but they differ with respect to the question of whether and how the body participates in such equality. For Plato and the Platonic tradition a foretaste of "justice itself" can be obtained by living a philosophical life. In Philo of Alexandria's terms, those who practice such a life "fly from the body as if from a prison or tomb" (ὥσπερ ἐξ εἱρκτῆς ἢ μνήματος, *Somn.* 1.139), and yet they do not nullify the body's function as an index of the soul's true place. Instead they show it to be an 'empty tomb' on which their *askēsis* is displayed as "an ornament and badge of beauty" (Philo, *QG* 2.69). Philo describes the wicked, in contrast, as "carrying the body about like a tomb" (τὸ σῶμα οἷα τύμβον περιφέροντας, *QG* 1.70). In both cases he presumes that the body is a *visible* indicator of a person's likeness to the divine, and in this he is basically faithful to Plato.

Paul's perspective is both similar to and different from that of Philo and the Platonic tradition. For Paul, 'justice itself' is not something to be obtained by asceticism or a philosophical way of life but something that is already immanent in a world on the verge of eschatological transformation. Paul's body is not an empty tomb but an index of Christ; it does not signify old hierarchies but a new social location in Christ.

5. Hereafter Let No One Trouble Me

Citing Käsemann, J. Louis Martyn writes of Gal 6:17 that Paul considers his body "to be a major form of communication, alongside the words of his letter.… Paul's physical body is thus a place in which one finds a sign of the present activity of the redeemer in the world."[38] What Martyn does not say is that Paul radically reconfigures the popular Platonic notion that willful asceticism signifies the soul's hopeful anticipation of ascending to its true home, yet without jettisoning basic propositions like the σῶμα-σῆμα formula. Though Paul may beat his body into submission (1 Cor 9·27), more often he

---

38. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 568–569.

points to physical suffering and psychic depredation inflicted *from without,* rather than heroic feats of asceticism, as indicators of God's decisive intervention in the affairs of the cosmos. Nowhere is this more evident than in 2 Cor 4:7–12, a passage that Martyn and other commentators regularly invoke as a parallel to Gal 6:17:[39]

> We have this treasure (θησαυρὸν) in earthen vessels (ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν), so that this extraordinary power might be from God and not from us. In all things we are hard-pressed but not crushed, needy but not destitute, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying about the death of Jesus in the body (πάντοτε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες) so that the life of Jesus may be visible in our body (ἐν τῷ σώματι ἡμῶν φανερωθῇ). For while we live we are constantly being handed over to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be visible in our mortal flesh. So then, death works in us but life in you.

One of the derived meanings of the word περιφέρειν is "to publish," and this seems to be the sense in which both Philo and Paul use it. In so doing they evoke the earliest definition of σῶμα to have come down to us: "some say that it is a tomb … because by it the soul signifies (σημαίνει) whatever it signifes (σημαίνῃ), for which reason it is rightly called "σῆμα" (Plato, *Cratylus* 400c). Paul's remarks in Galatians suggest, however, that his body is not an empty tomb but a tomb in which he dwells with Christ, having been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:19–20). They suggest, in fact, that his body is the very tomb of the Galatians' founder. Should the Galatians neglect it, *should they fail to read the sign* and remember to whom they owe their freedom, they will be cut off from Christ. In order to prevent that, Paul concludes his letter with a final reminder, written in large letters by his own hand: "hereafter let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body" (Gal 6:17). Whatever these marks may have been, there is nothing 'neutral' about them.

---

39. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) , 324, n. 129; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 275–276; James Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Hendrickson, 1993), 347.