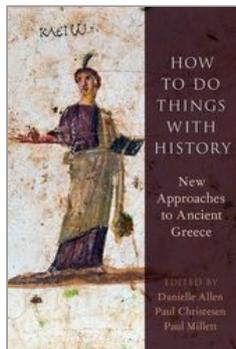


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Picturing History

The Ethics and Aesthetics of Tyrannicide in the Art of Classical Athens and Early Imperial China

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Abstract and Keywords

In this chapter, Jeremy Tanner examines two series of images—one from Classical Athens and one from Han China—of political assassinations, more specifically “tyrannicides.” These images were replicated, with interesting variations, time and time again, and must have been among the more popular and recognizable iconographies of their eras. Both are concerned with figuring the limits of legitimate power and the ethical basis for and significance of violent resistance to arbitrary power and its overthrow. In order to interpret these images in a comparative frame, Tanner finds that he must also explore the concept of the “tyrant” in order to construct a conceptual catwalk between these two contexts. The very project of comparison, then, helps bring to the surface some of the intricacies of the lives of concepts in particular places.

Keywords: Han China, tyrannicides, Classical Athens, Jing Ke, Harmodius, Aristogeiton

Introduction

This chapter examines two series of remarkable images that had an exemplary status in Classical Athens (480–323 BCE) and Han China (206 BCE–220 CE). Both of them focus on political assassinations, more specifically “tyrannicides,” a potentially problematic term that I will seek to justify shortly. A Roman marble copy of a fifth-century BCE Greek bronze statue group (fig. 10.1) shows Harmodius and Aristogeiton inaugurating Athenian democracy by slaying the tyrant of Athens, who is not himself depicted—for very good reasons, as we shall see. A carved frieze from an Eastern Han tomb, of the second century CE, depicts the attempt of Jing Ke to assassinate the king of Qin, later to become the First Emperor of unified China, Qin Shihuangdi (fig. 10.2). Jing Ke is the figure on the left, with his arms raised, being arrested by one of the king’s retainers. The dagger that he has thrown in a last desperate effort to realize his assassination attempt has pierced clean through the pillar, its ribbons still waving from the hilt. The king himself flees to the right.



Both images seem to have had a foundational status within the political and artistic culture of their societies. They are both among the earliest examples of

Figure 10.1 The Tyrannicides: Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Roman marble copy of bronze statues, by Critius and Nesiotes. Athens, 476 BCE. Photo: Permission of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo - Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.



Figure 10.2 Jing Ke and the King of Qin, and other scenes. Rubbing after engravings on the south wall of Chamber 2, Wu Family Cemetery. Shandong Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. Top register: Prince Zhaobai shot by Guan Zhong. Middle register: Jing Ke and the King of Qin. Third register: Fuxi and Nuwa. Image: Courtesy of Harvard University Fine Arts Library, Special Collections.

representations of specific historical events in their respective artistic traditions. Moreover, as we shall see, they were replicated, with interesting variations, time and time again, and must have been among the **(p.264)** **(p.265)** most popular and recognizable iconographies of their eras. Both are

concerned with figuring the limits of legitimate power and the ethical basis for and significance of violent resistance to arbitrary power and its overthrow. Interestingly, in both cases the assassination attempts were not successes but heroic failures, and it is important to explore how both heroism and **(p.266)** failure are registered or dealt with in the two visual narratives. Yet another parallel is that in both cases the versions narrated in the images were the subject of fierce criticism by some contemporaries who had more exacting standards of historical veracity than the image makers. Thucydides has a famous excursus on the misleading character of the standard transmitted versions of the role of Harmodius and Aristogeiton in establishing Athenian democracy.¹ And the Han intellectual Wang Chong (*Lunheng* IV.1) is equally critical of the received accounts of Jing Ke's attempt on the king of Qin, especially the stories of omens such as a white halo appearing around the sun at the moment Jing Ke struck. He reserves particular scorn for the detail of the dagger that pierces the column, an absurd physical impossibility, he says, since the column itself was bronze.

But before we proceed to any more sustained comparative analysis, we had best clarify some terms. "The writing of comparative history," as Paul Cartledge has suggested, "is rather like belling a cat: everyone agrees that it would be a marvellous thing to do, but it is fiendishly difficult of achievement. The difficulties, broadly speaking, can all be reduced to one, that of ensuring like is being compared with like."² In Sino-Hellenic comparisons, the challenge of ensuring that like is being compared with like is particularly difficult, since the danger for those of us working from within the Western academy is that the comparison takes place in ways that already bias it in Eurocentric terms, and the likeness of the two objects of comparison may be merely the artifact of a Procrustean forcing of the Chinese case to fit Western terms.³

The concepts of both aesthetics and ethics of course have a very specific history within Western thought. Aesthetics, as we understand the term, is in fact an eighteenth-century CE invention, and, although the Greeks had the word, its meaning was much broader, referring to perception in general.⁴ The development of ethics as a disciplinary field within modern philosophy is also indebted to Greek models, and an argument

could be made that comparisons of Greek and Chinese ethical philosophy (**p.267**) entail forcing the moral discourses of texts like Confucius' *Analects* or the *Mencius* into a radically alien context.⁵

For the purposes of this chapter, I would like to bracket the issues that these concepts raise and stipulate some working assumptions. First, as far as the visual art of both Classical Athens and Han China is concerned, it is clear that narrative representations were the objects of moral responses and evaluations, and so can be said to have a broadly ethical character, whether or not that was shaped by the kind of second-order reflections implied by notions of ethics or moral philosophy. Second, the ethical agency of these images involved more than just the encoding and decoding of the moral values that may be implicit in them. The ways in which the narratives are given visual form is constitutive of their moral agency, from the styling of the depictions of the protagonists to the specific material and institutional contexts in which the narratives were mediated to viewers.

The concept of tyrant, however, is more immediately and unavoidably problematic. Our modern Western understanding of the term comes straight out of the Greek tradition, and Harmodius and Aristogeiton, as the Tyrannicides, are key figures around whom the negative associations of tyrant, and the heroic associations of tyrannicide, were constructed. The word *tyrannos* in fact seems to be Lydian, rather than Greek, and it was borrowed by the Greeks from the Near East, like so much else during the so-called Orientalizing period.⁶ It was used to describe individuals who had achieved a position of exclusive dominance in their community, generally by somewhat irregular means. Originally it may have had relatively positive connotations even in the Greek world, but it became overwritten with negative associations of unconstrained power and oppressive rule as a result of the Persian Wars and the invasions of Greece by Darius and Xerxes, the original oriental despots, in the early fifth century BCE.⁷ The radical contrast between democracy and tyranny was strengthened by the fact that Hippias, the last of the Athenian tyrants, accompanied the first Persian attack on Athens in 490 BCE, in the hope of being reinstated as sole ruler (Hdt. 6.106–7). There is some reason to believe that this

was the context in which the original Tyrannicide group (by Antenor) was set up.⁸

(p.268) Given that our own concept of tyranny is so much embedded in this specific history, and is in part defined in opposition to democracy, one might at first sight expect it to be difficult to locate an analog in China, where monarchic rule was largely uncontested. Among thinkers in the legalist tradition, like Xunzi (ca. 310–235 BCE) and Li Si (c. 280–208 BCE), the right-hand man of the First Emperor (259–210 BCE), the unconstrained autocracy of the ruler was taken for granted, and even encouraged as conducive to social order. Indeed, Han Feizi (279–233 BCE) argued that the internecine conflicts of the Warring States (475–221 BCE) were the long-term result of Wu, the first Zhou monarch, overthrowing the last Shang ruler (ca. 1046 BCE), thus violating the ruler-servitor relationship and undermining orderly government, notwithstanding the shortcomings of the last king of the Shang.⁹

Jie, the last king of the Xia (notionally died c. 1600 BCE), and Zhou (died ca. 1046 BCE), the last king of the Shang, were, however, notoriously bad rulers. And in the Confucian tradition, particularly in the *Mencius*, we find a discussion of rulership that emphasizes the accountability of the ruler for the welfare of his subjects. Mencius develops quite a rich vocabulary of abusive rulership. He characterizes the present as an age without true kings, characterized by *nuezheng* (虐政), government with the claws of a tiger:¹⁰

After the death of Yao and Shun [two sage rulers of mythology], the principles that mark the sages fell into decay. Oppressive or violent sovereigns (*baojun*, 暴君) arose one after another. They pulled down houses to make ponds and lakes, so that people knew not where they could rest in quiet; they threw fields out of cultivation to form gardens and parks, so that people could not get food and clothes. (*Mencius* III.ii.9.5; trans. Legge 1991, 280)¹¹

Perhaps most importantly for my purposes, Mencius asserted the ethical propriety of overthrowing and slaying rulers who did not manifest the fundamental virtue of benevolence toward

the people. Asked about the overthrow and murder of Zhou, the last king of the Shang, he replies:

(p.269)

He who outrages the benevolence proper to his nature is called a robber; he who outrages righteousness is called a ruffian. The robber and the ruffian we call a worthless fellow. I have heard of the cutting off of the worthless fellow Zhou, but I have not heard of the murdering of a sovereign in his case (聞誅一夫紂矣，未聞弑君). (*Mencius* I.ii.8.3; trans. Legge 1991, 167, with Pines 2008b, 15)

Although tyrant-hating and tyrant-killing never became in imperial China the kind of identity-defining civic duty that it was in Classical Athens,¹² I think one can make a persuasive case that the concepts of the tyrant and the *baojun* would have been mutually intelligible. In a text by an elitist Athenian opponent of democracy, the so-called Old Oligarch, the author even uses the term “tyrant” to describe the *demos*, on the grounds that democratic government alienated “shareholders” in the state “from their proper social positions and ideological authority,”¹³ for example by levying heavy taxes on the rich to fund democratic vanity projects and allocating political office by lot rather than merit. This bears at least a family resemblance to the criticisms of transgressive autocratic monarchs starting with Mencius and continuing through the Han in, for example, Dong Zhongshu’s account of the Heavenly Mandate.¹⁴ What counts as people’s “proper social positions” and their “ideological authority” is of course very significantly different in Classical Athens and early imperial China by virtue of the differing character of the two political systems.

The focus of my analysis in this essay will be on the ways in which visual art in early imperial China and Classical Athens constructs the ethics of political violence, above all resistance to autocratic power, through the visual representation of tyrannicide. How exactly are Jing Ke and Harmodius and Aristogeiton constructed as positive exemplars—and their victims as negative exemplars—by means of pictorial narratives, and by means of the visual analogies and comparisons that are built into the artistic monuments within which their stories are told, and retold? To what purposes was their exemplary status put, and how did the character of their

visual images, and the ways in which they were displayed, shape the formation of the ethical subjectivity of their viewers? How did the very **(p.270)** different character of the two political systems, imperial China and democratic Athens, inform the character and uses of images of tyrannicide?

Jing Ke and Qin Shihuangdi

The best-known depictions of Jing Ke's attempted assassination of the king of Qin come from the chambers of the Wu family cemetery, a series of funerary shrines, richly decorated with engraved narratives, dating to the middle of the second century CE (figs. 10.2-10.3). The story itself was well known from Chapter 86 of the *Shiji* of Sima Qian (ca. 145-86 BCE).¹⁵ This chapter of the *Shiji* contains biographies of a series of assassin retainers, that is to say retainers of princes or rulers of Warring States who manifested their loyalty to their prince by seeking to take the life of his enemy.

According to the *Shiji*, Jing Ke (died 227 BCE) was from the small state of Wei. He "loved to read books and practice

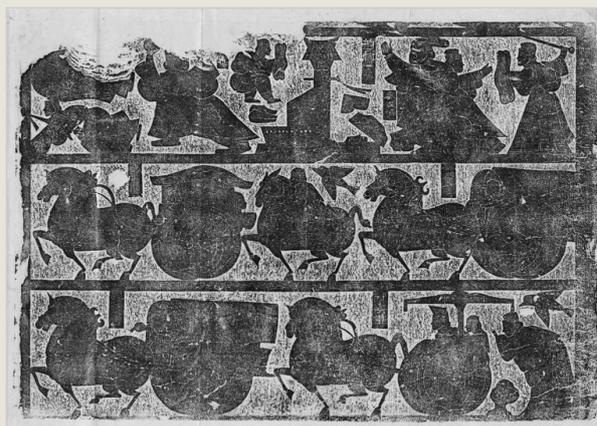


Figure 10.3 Jing Ke and the King of Qin. Rubbing after engravings from south wall Chamber 1, Wu Family Cemetery. Shandong Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. Top register: Jing Ke and the King of Qin. Lower registers: chariot procession. Image: Courtesy of Harvard University Fine Arts Library, Special Collections.

swordsmanship" but failed to **(p.271)** establish himself in any career and instead wandered through the Chinese states, making friends with rather lowlife figures such as a zither player and a dog-butcher and carousing with them in the marketplace. He was, so the story goes, eventually

recommended by a friend to Prince Dan of Yan, who was looking for some way to stave off the threat of the expansive state of Qin.

Having secured Jing Ke's agreement to participate in a plot to kill the king of Qin, Prince Dan lavishes rewards upon his new retainer, elevating him to a high position within the government and giving him gifts of women, chariots, and anything else Jing Ke wished. Jing Ke meanwhile seeks to formulate a plot that might have some chance of success against the well-guarded king of Qin. In order to gain access to the king, he prepares an extraordinary present by persuading the fugitive Qin general Fan Yuqi—whose family had been destroyed by the king of Qin—to commit suicide so that Jing Ke could offer his head to the king. Further, he prepares a map detailing some of the territories of Wei, to be offered to the king of Qin as a symbol of submission. Inside the rolled-up map, he conceals a dagger with which to stab the king. Jing Ke departs Yan for Qin, accompanied by his companion Qin Wuyang, but not before a tearful farewell scene, which is one of the most famous in Chinese literature. The prince and his retainers see Jing Ke off wearing white mourning clothes. Jing Ke's friend Gao Jianli "struck up the zither," and "as tears streamed from the eyes of the men present," Jing Ke sang the song: "*Xiao Xiao* cries the wind/The Yi Waters are cold/Brave men, once gone/Never come back."

On arriving at the capital of Qin, they are admitted to the king's presence. Although Qin Wuyang nearly gives the game away, turning deathly pale and shivering with fright in the presence of the king, all initially goes to plan. The king of Qin is delighted with the presentation of Fan Yuqi's head, and allows Jing Ke to draw near to show him the map. Jing Ke unrolls the map, and the dagger appears. At this moment, Jing Ke reaches for the dagger with one hand, while using the other to grab the king of Qin by the sleeve. The king leaps up, leaving his torn sleeve in the hands of Jing Ke, who then pursues the king around a column with Jing Ke unable to catch up close enough to stab the king and the king unable to defend himself because the constraints of the space did not allow him to draw his long-sword. The courtiers look on in panic, unable to intervene effectively because they were, for obvious reasons, all unarmed. **(p.272)** Eventually, the king's doctor saves him, by striking Jing Ke with his medicine bag. The king recovers his composure sufficiently to draw his sword and

strike Jing Ke, who is then grabbed by some of the king's guards, but not before he is able to hurl the dagger in the king's direction; the dagger misses its target and penetrates the column. Jing Ke is swiftly put to death, in spite of his claim that his original intention had not been to harm the king of Qin but merely to persuade him at knifepoint to give up some of the territories he had acquired from other states, thus emulating an earlier hero assassin-retainer of the eighth century BCE.

The visual representations of the scene all focus on the moment of Jing Ke's being arrested by one of the king's courtiers and letting fly the dagger that penetrates the column. Many of the key motifs of the story as told in the *Shiji* are included: Fan Yuqi's head in the box; the dagger in the column; the torn sleeve from the emperor's robes; the fleeing king of Qin; Jing Ke's companion, Qin Wuyang, prostrate with fear and absolutely no help at all; and an armed guard arriving on the scene rather too late to be of meaningful assistance to the king. The raised hair of Jing Ke is a conventional index of a superabundance of *qi*, vital energy, expressed in righteous anger. It aligns him with representations of valorous warriors and officials distinguished by the performance of "singular deeds," *du xing*, a specific category of heroic action recorded in the histories of the later Han.¹⁶ Beyond this clear index of Jing Ke's valor, however, it is difficult to know quite how to read this scene, not least since the failure, indeed the futility, of his efforts is quite clear.

In the literary tradition of the Han, the successor dynasty to the Qin, the response to Jing Ke's assassination attempt was somewhat ambivalent.¹⁷ Whatever the truth of the matter, the First Emperor was, during the course of the Han period, increasingly constructed as a tyrant figure. His chancellor Li Si had advocated the prohibition of private learning, so that the absolute authority of the emperor "will not be preempted by the arguments of remonstrating . . . debaters,"¹⁸ leading to an infamous book burning.¹⁹ The *shi*, the elite official class, doubtless also found their **(p.273)** autonomy constrained by the fact that in a unified empire they were no longer free to wander from court to court seeking better conditions of employment.²⁰ This general resentment perhaps provides the context within which the execution of some 420 *fangshi*, magicians who had sought to persuade the emperor they could discover means to extend his life indefinitely, became

translated in the historical tradition to the claim that he had buried 400 Confucians alive.²¹ Sima Xiangru (ca. 179–117 BCE), one of the leading literary figures of the Western Han, chose Jing Ke as one of the first subjects for a *zan* or eulogy, a new genre of which Sima Xiangru himself seems to have been the creator.²²

Other writers seem to have thought of Jing Ke as a simple murderer, or would-be murderer, since, as even those favorable toward him point out, he was singularly ineffective.²³ His failure of swordsmanship at the critical moment was the subject of ironic humor. One version of the story has him with the king of Qin at his mercy, only for the king to ask the favor of being able to hear a last song by a favorite female zither player before his death. Jing Ke, a great lover of zither playing, incredibly agrees, and the zither player, because Jing Ke is unable to understand the dialect in which she is singing, is able to give a coded message to the king of Qin that facilitates his escape from Jing Ke's clutches.²⁴

It is sometimes held that Jing Ke, like the other assassin retainers, was simply an exemplar of loyalty to a master who had recognized him, but even in this role he cuts a somewhat ambivalent figure. It had taken some three years for him to recognize his indebtedness for Prince Dan's extraordinary hospitality, which included golden ingots to throw at frogs in a pond, a meal made from the liver of one of the prince's favorite thoroughbred horses, and the gift of the severed hands of a female musician (apparently more alluring to Jing Ke than her body).²⁵ Against this background it is not immediately easy to understand how in the visual tradition of the Han his image became so popular as to outnumber by a factor of ten or **(p.274)** more those of the other assassin retainers whose stories are narrated in the *Shiji*.²⁶

Harmodius and Aristogeiton

Harmodius and Aristogeiton are also in certain respects unlikely heroes, though in their statues there are none of the hints of the ambivalence that one can see in the pictures of Jing Ke. There are two versions of the story of these two Tyrannicides. One is implicit in the visual images and in some late archaic *skolia* or drinking songs, which celebrated how Harmodius and Aristogeiton had made Athens *isonomon*, a place where citizens enjoyed equality in relation to the *nomoi* or laws.²⁷ The term *isonomia*, at least by the time of the creation of the statue of the Tyrannicides by Critius and Nesiotes in 477/6 BCE, had effectively become synonymous with democracy. According to this “official” version of the story, the rule of the tyrants was despotic; many of the best citizens were driven into exile or subjected to torture, while the tyrant and his cronies monopolized the organs of government. Harmodius and Aristogeiton sacrificed themselves on behalf of the freedom of their fellow citizens, dying during the course of their exploit, but ridding the city of the tyrant and restoring the ancestral democracy.

This is how we see them in the statue that was set up in the Agora, the main civic space of democratic Athens (fig. 10.1).²⁸ On the left, the older bearded man, Aristogeiton, reaches out his left arm in a defensive gesture, warding off any blow against either himself or his accomplice Harmodius, while his right arm is drawn back ready to stab the tyrant. Harmodius, his left arm at his side, raises his sword above his head in a gesture that **(p.275)** renders his entire body vulnerable to any counter-thrust, indicating the self-sacrificial nature of his deed.²⁹

This statue group was one of a series of unprecedented honors enjoyed by the Tyrannicides and their descendants. There was, at their grave in the Kerameikos cemetery, an annual public sacrifice to the Tyrannicides that was overseen by the polemarch (the senior military official of the city) and that took place as part of the cycle of sacrifices that honored the Athenian war dead. Their cult was also celebrated in the context of the Panathenaic festival.³⁰ The descendants of the Tyrannicides enjoyed the privilege of *sitesis*, the right to take meals, paid for by the state, in the *prytaneion*, the symbolic hearth of the community.

The most obvious immediate contrast between the Tyrannicide statue group and the pictures of Jing Ke's attempt on the king of Qin is that the tyrant himself, the victim of the heroic assassination, is not depicted. There are in fact good reasons for the tyrant himself not being represented in the statue group, and indeed not being present in any of the representations of the Tyrannicides in vase-painting (with the exception of a vase-painting by the Cleophon painter, roughly contemporary with the statue group³¹). Harmodius and Aristogeiton's attempt to kill Athens' tyrant was in fact, just like Jing Ke's, a failure, not the glorious success that the statue suggests, and also not even a particularly heroic failure.

A second version of the conspiracy of Harmodius and Aristogeiton is given by Thucydides (6.53–9; cf. Hdt. 5.55) in the context of his account of the mutilation of images of Hermes immediately prior to the Athenian naval expedition against Sicily and the fears concerning “oligarchic-tyrannical” conspiracies to which the mutilation of the herms gave rise.³² The alternative story runs something like this. Hipparchus, the brother of the tyrant Hippias, falls in love with the beautiful ephebe Harmodius. The latter, however, rejects his advances, since he is already the *eromenos*, the beloved, of Aristogeiton, the older male *erastes* or lover, according to the classic Greek model of homoerotic bonding. Affronted by Harmodius' (p. 276) rejection, Hipparchus takes his revenge by inviting Harmodius' sister to fill a prestigious role as a bearer of ritual instruments in one of the major religious processions of the Athenian festival calendar. When she turns up on the day of the procession, Hipparchus sends her away claiming that she is not a virgin and therefore not fit for the role. This is taken by Harmodius as an affront to his family's honor, and, together with his lover Aristogeiton, he hatches a plot for revenge against Hipparchus and his family. According to one variant, Hipparchus himself is the primary target; according to another, Hippias. The plan is to catch both brothers at the Panathenaic festival and to be able to approach them armed, by hiding daggers or short swords in the myrtle wreaths that were worn by participants in the procession. As with Jing Ke, the plot does not go according to plan, and, believing they had been betrayed, Harmodius and Aristogeiton attack and kill Hipparchus before Hippias joins the procession. Harmodius is killed on the spot by Hipparchus' bodyguards, and Aristogeiton dies shortly afterward, having been personally

tortured by Hippias in an attempt to extract the names of other conspirators. If, following almost all modern historians, one prefers this account of events to the “official” version, it was only four years later, under very different circumstances, that Hippias was expelled and the tyranny overthrown, and that as much a result of the intervention of the Spartans as of any action on the part of the Athenians themselves.

Portraying the victim of the so-called Tyrannicides in this defining monument of the Athenian democracy would have given the game away. The victim was not the tyrant at all, but his brother, and his murder had nothing to do with the foundation of Athenian democracy but was the outcome of homoerotic jealousies and familial slights within the narrow circles of the Athenian aristocracy.³³ Moreover, as Thucydides (6.59; cf. Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 19.1) points out, the harsher moments of Hippias’ rule were the result of the assassination of his brother, not its cause. Friends and family of the conspirators were, unsurprisingly, imprisoned, tortured, executed, or driven into exile in fear of their lives. Before these last four years of tyranny in Athens, during the rule of Hippias’ father Peisistratus and the early years of Hippias’ own domination, there are many reasons **(p.277)** to believe Athens enjoyed something of a golden age.³⁴ Attica was integrated into a unified state; prosperity came from the opening up of the silver mines of Laurion; there was a massive program of monumental building on the Acropolis; and the Panathenaic Games were established, along with the festival of Dionysus and the first performances of Athenian tragedy. Notwithstanding this other possible account, in Athenian myth-history the rule of Hippias was repeatedly reimagined as a tyranny put to an end by the heroic action of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, whether explicitly in the statue group itself, and in the numerous coins and vase-paintings that depicted the statue group, or implicitly in state-sponsored reliefs and paintings that depicted the archetypal Athenian hero, Theseus, in the guise of the Tyrannicides.³⁵

Images as Exemplars: Displaying and Viewing Tyrannicides

In different ways, then, both Jing Ke and Harmodius and Aristogeiton seem problematic moral exemplars. In order to understand the popularity of these two images of tyrannicide and their specific moral agency, we need to place them back in their broader material and historical contexts. We will examine them first as elements in broader sets of images, and then as images with very specific formats, displayed in specific social and material settings that shaped the ways in which viewers engaged with and responded to them. As we shall see, the cultural work that they performed, and their operation as moral exemplars, notwithstanding the rather unpromising background I have sketched, was intimately related to the ways in which specifically visual strategies of analogy and comparison integrated them into broader programs of political representation.

Imaging and Imagining Tyrannicide in Classical Athens

The statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton as tyrannicides were set up as the first, and for a long time the only, honorific portraits in the key public space of the democratic Athenian state, the Agora (fig. 10.4). The **(p.278)** Agora housed many of the major institutions of the state: the *bouleuterion* (council chamber), the state mint, and the courts. In the early fifth century, it also served as the space in which plays were performed. The Tyrannicide group seems to have been placed in the northern part of the Agora, in an area that became particularly dense with monuments that were central to Athenian political self-representation.³⁶ Those monuments included the Theseion, a shrine of Theseus that we know from literary texts to have been located somewhere in this area; the Hephaisteion, a temple to the god Hephaestus; the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios (Zeus the guardian of freedom), where law codes were publically displayed; and the Stoa Poikile, which was decorated with paintings celebrating the victory of the Athenians against **(p.279)** the Persians at the battle of Marathon. As we shall see, the paintings and sculptures that decorated these monuments all drew on and elaborated the imagery of the Tyrannicides through visual analogies and comparisons that served to construct a kind of ethical code of emancipatory violence.

centaurs.³⁹ Both the Amazonomachy and the Centauromachy were used in early Classical Athenian culture as mythological analogs for the struggle between the Greeks and the Persians in the Persian wars. Like the Persians, the Amazons were easterners, and on the volute krater in question the analogy between them and the Persians is signaled by the Amazons' Persian-style clothing, featuring soft caps and fancy decorated trousers or leggings, as opposed to the hoplite armor and heroic nudity of their Greek opponents (fig. 10.5a). At the wedding of Perithous, the centaurs, although invited **(p.280)** **(p.281)** to the party, partake of too much wine. In accordance with their half-bestial nature they are unable to control themselves and seek to assault the Lapith women. Herodotus (5.18–20) tells very similar stories about the conduct of the Persians during the invasion of Greece: hospitably received by members of the Macedonian aristocracy in northern Greece, and invited to dine with them, they break all the rules of guest-friendship by getting drunk and attempting to rape their hosts' wives and daughters. The figure of Theseus, at the center of the frieze on the neck of the volute krater (fig. 10.5b), conspicuously echoes the pose of Harmodius, though with an axe replacing the sword, establishing a parallel between the heroic accomplishments of Theseus, the Greek defeat of the Persians, and the Tyrannicides' slaying of the tyrant, as heroic acts conducive to good social order and political liberty.⁴⁰



Figure 10.5 (a) Volute Krater by the Painter of the Woolly Satyrs. Painted in Athens, ca. 460 BCE. NY Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.286.84. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. Photo© 2015 SCALA, Florence.

(b) Centauromachy: detail from Volute Krater by the Painter of the Woolly Satyrs. Painted in Athens, ca. 460 BCE. NY Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.286.84. Drawing from A. Furtwangler and K. Reichhold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei*. Munich: Bruckmann; 1924, pl. 12b.

A tyrannicidal
Theseus also
appears in
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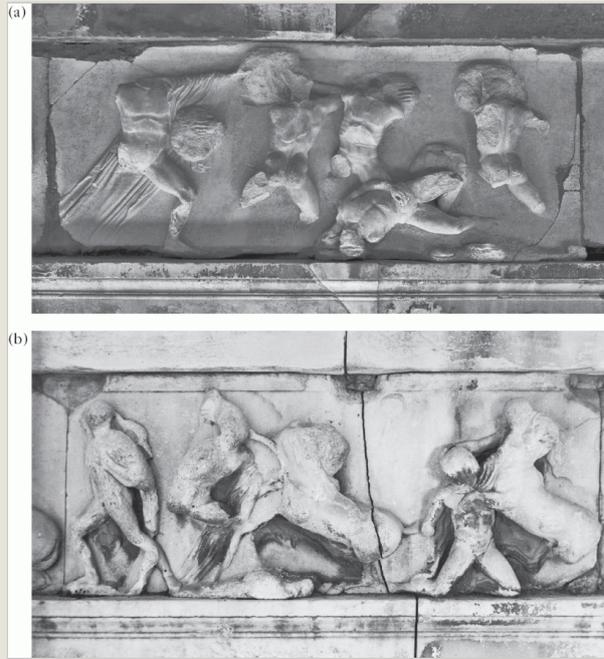


Figure 10.6 Friezes from the Temple of Hephaestus. Athens, ca. 430 BCE.

(a) East Frieze: Theseus against the Pallantids.

(b) West Frieze: Theseus against the Centaurs. Photos: Agora Excavations LXII.4 (Slab 4), XXXVII.24 (Slab 3). American School of Classical Studies, Athens.



centauromachy and a battle against the Pallantids, both of which are depicted on the friezes of the Hephaisteion, which was built in the 440s BCE.⁴¹ These scenes represent him once in the guise of Harmodius and once in the guise of

Aristogeiton (fig. 10.6a–b). The same visual analogies are elaborated in a cup by the

Figure 10.7 The Deeds of Theseus. Red-figure cup by the Codros painter. Painted in Athens, ca. 450–440 BCE. British Museum, GR 1850-3.2-3, vase E84. Photo: © British Museum.

Codros Painter (fig. 10.7). This shows a cycle of deeds performed by Theseus on his journey from Troezen to Attica. Among the deeds depicted is the slaying of Skiron, and in this scene the figure of Theseus strongly echoes the Harmodius statue when seen from the rear. Similarly, the figure of Theseus slaying the Crommyonian sow is very clearly based on the statue of Aristogeiton, again from the back. Both versions of Theseus/Tyrannicide are shown from the front in the depiction of the cycle located on the exterior of the vase.⁴²

Perhaps a decade or fifteen years after the creation of the Theseion, the Stoa Poikile was erected in the Athenian Agora and decorated with a cycle of paintings including an Amazonomachy, the Sack of Troy, and the battle of Marathon.⁴³ The former two were, of course, mythic analogs for the Athenian victory over the Persians at Marathon. The painting of Marathon is described in some detail by Pausanias (1.15). At the extreme left-hand edge, it showed the Athenians and the Plataeans drawn up in line of battle, **(p.282)** and the general Miltiades giving the signal committing them to battle. The extreme right showed the end of the battle, with the Greeks slaughtering the Persians as they tried to flee to their ships. The middle of the painting showed the two armies meeting on the field of battle and was broken up into a series of individual duels. The centerpiece of those duels, and of the whole painting, showed the heroic death of the polemarch Callimachus turning the battle in the Athenians' favor through his self-sacrifice.⁴⁴

(p.283) Evelyn Harrison (1972) has made a persuasive argument that the south frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis of Athens represents the battle of Marathon and is based on key aspects of the painting from the Stoa Poikile. The left-hand part of slab g of the south frieze shows a Greek warrior about to cut down a falling Persian, dressed in tunic and trousers (fig. 10.8). The Greek is naked. His himation falls around his **(p.284)** knees (a conventional heroic motif). As he raises his right arm to deliver the coup de grace to his

Persian adversary, the Greek warrior's left arm swings back, as a kind of counterbalance, leaving his own torso unprotected. All these features echo in detail the posture of Harmodius from the Tyrannicide group (cf. fig. 10.1).⁴⁵

This must have been a deliberate choice, and one informed by the same version of events at the battle of Marathon as that which is



Figure 10.8 South Frieze from the Temple of Athena Nike. Athens, ca. 420 BCE. Slab G, British Museum. Photo: © British Museum.

reported by Herodotus. At the end of a debate between the Athenian commanders concerning whether to attack the Persians immediately, before their army is fully disembarked, or to wait for assistance from the Spartans, delayed by the festival of Carneia, Miltiades, advocating immediate attack, addresses Callimachus, the polemarch with whom the final decision lies: "Callimachus. It is up to you either to enslave Athens or to make her free and leave for yourself a memory such as neither Harmodius nor Aristogeiton left" (Hdt. 6.109).

Harrison suggests that the figure on slab g of the south frieze of the Athena Nike temple, which figure echoes the pose of Harmodius from the Tyrannicide group, must be Callimachus, shown at the moment of his *aristeia*, as depicted at the center of the painting of the battle of Marathon in the Stoa Poikile.⁴⁶ On the frieze, the Persians are shown fully clothed, wearing their customary tunic and trousers, a touch on the corpulent side, and sluggish in their movement, according to some observers.⁴⁷ The Athenians, by contrast, are shown in an ideal and elevating nudity. Their **(p.285)** muscled bodies and striking postures embody an ethos that was held to be characteristic of the men of Marathon and their descendants, ready "to use their bodies as if they were those of other men, when it is in the service of their city . . . to accomplish anything on her behalf" (Thuc. 1.70). The figure of Callimachus in particular evokes the concept of the beautiful

death, informed by a positive decision to sacrifice one's own life on behalf of the *polis*.⁴⁸

The visual analogies connecting the deeds of Theseus, the Tyrannicides, and the heroes of Marathon served the mutual elaboration of the moral meaning of each story. The Amazonomachy paralleled the defensive character of the Greeks' struggle against the Persians, since Theseus' heroic battle against the Amazons had taken place in Athens itself in the immediate environs of the Acropolis.⁴⁹ The Tyrannicide imagery used for Callimachus implied that the battle of Marathon was fought in support of freedom. The depiction of Theseus as a kind of archetypal precursor for both the Tyrannicides and Callimachus framed their deeds as punishments of violations of moral order and made the courage of the Athenians in the protection of freedom at Marathon appear as the manifestation of an intrinsic Athenian virtue, rooted in time immemorial.

The temple of Athena Nike itself represents a final ideological twist in the development of this ethic of violence in the service of freedom, informed by the iconography of the Tyrannicides.⁵⁰ By the second half of the fifth century, Athens had acquired an empire of subject cities, obliged to pay tribute to fund Athens' navy and military. The temple of Athena Nike was built shortly after the annual payments of Athens' allies had been reassessed in 425 BCE as part of a more muscular imperialism associated with the Athenian statesman Cleon, and it is no coincidence that the bastion on which the temple of Athena Nike stood was also decorated with shields captured by Cleon in his great triumph over the Spartans at Sphacteria.⁵¹ In addition to the Marathon frieze, two further battle friezes decorated the temple of Athena Nike: one a contemporary engagement, possibly from the Sphacteria campaign, the other the mythical slaughter of Eurystheus, a Peloponnesian king who invaded Attica in pursuit of **(p.286)** the children of Heracles.⁵² This myth was a well-established exemplification of the exceptional piety and compassion of the Athenians—they alone among the Greeks had offered the Heracleidai sanctuary. It also demonstrated their unparalleled virtue as defenders of freedom and punishers of hubris.⁵³ Juxtaposing myth, Marathon, and the contemporary battles of the Peloponnesian War, this program of the temple of Athena Nike legitimated the wars against Sparta and her allies as a continuation of, and congruent with, the great struggles of

earlier eras. The message is clear: all Athens' wars, even those against other Greeks, are defensive wars; she intervenes only to punish the lawless, to protect the weak, and to liberate the enslaved, all in a spirit of compassion and self-sacrifice.⁵⁴ This ethical stance was even emulated by some of Athens' supporters in subject cities, where democratic regimes might hope for Athenian support in coups against oligarchic regimes, and one imagines that something like this is what lies behind the choice of the Tyrannicide group as a motif on several issues of coins of Cyzicus (fig. 10.9) during the latter part of the fifth century.⁵⁵

The display of Tyrannicide imagery in the sculptural program on the Athena Nike temple is also an important indicator of the way in which this imagery was framed and of the kind of response it was expected to arouse, and thus represents an important dimension of its moral

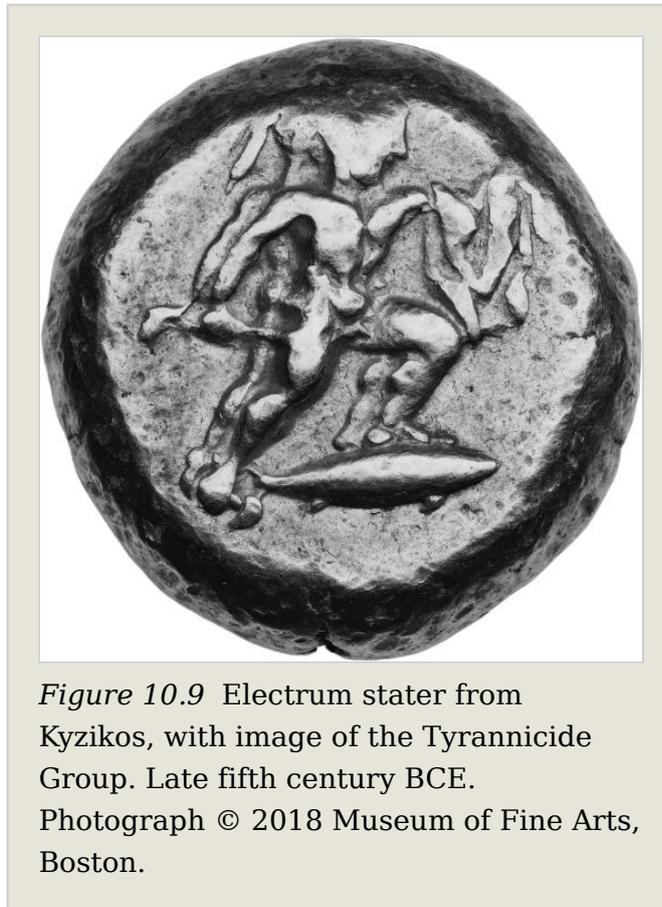


Figure 10.9 Electrum stater from Kyzikos, with image of the Tyrannicide Group. Late fifth century BCE. Photograph © 2018 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

agency. The frame is clearly a religious one, and the blurring of myth and history fits into a much broader pattern in Athenian rhetorical culture involving the transformation of myth and history into visual, even visionary, experience, and the appropriation of such visual experiences as an ethical model to shape the actions of a citizen audience. In his speech against Leocrates, the fourth-century orator Lycurgus praises the dramatist Euripides for telling the story, in one of his

plays, of the Athenian king Erechtheus and his family, who save the city from a Thracian invasion. Lycurgus says:

the finest example [*paradeigma*] to offer the citizens is the heroic acts of former times: they have only to look at them, and contemplate them to cultivate love of country in their hearts (πρὸς **(p.287)** ἄς ἀποβλέποντας καὶ θεωροῦντας συνεθίζεσθαι ταῖς ψυχαῖς τὸ τὴν πατρίδα φιλεῖν). (Lycurg. *Leoc.* 100 with Loraux 1986, 136)

In other speeches, the Marathon paintings themselves are invoked, and jurors are asked to envision them in their mind's eye (*dianoia*) as the source of exemplars against which to judge the character and contributions of later benefactors of the city (Aesch. 3.187; Dem. 49.94). These visions are “theoric”: the viewer is presented with a vision that is the object of wonder and reverence, a religious spectacle of transcendent beauty.⁵⁶ Similarly, **(p.288)** Thucydides has Pericles, in the first funeral oration of the Peloponnesian War, instruct his audience “to gaze on the power of the city day after day, becoming her lovers (τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ’ ἡμέραν ἔργω θεωμέωους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς).”⁵⁷ The mode of ethical formation implied here is passionate identification with the Athenian state and its goals, a mode originally formulated in the Tyrannicide group itself, as the glistening bronze of the statues standing in the Athenian Agora dazzled their viewers, evoking the “great light which came into being for the Athenians, when Aristogeiton and Harmodius slew Hipparchus . . . and made their fatherland’s earth [equal under the laws],” in the words of the epigram by Simonides that adorned the statues’ base.⁵⁸

Imaging and Imagining Tyrannicide in Early Imperial China

The ethical stance constructed on the basis of tyrannicide imagery in Han China is rather different. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the iconography of Jing Ke's attempted assassination of the king of Qin is extremely widespread and remarkably consistent. The examples from the Wu family cemetery that we looked at earlier are from the Shandong Peninsula in eastern China. However, depictions of the story of Jing Ke, such as two examples from the Mahao Tombs and Hezhuan, are also found in many regions of central China, as far west as Sichuan. All these representations share broadly the same composition and the same key iconographic details—the dagger in the column, the torn sleeve, the head in the box, and so on (figs. 10.10a–b and 10.11a–b).⁵⁹ They are also all from tombs and funerary shrines, commissioned by members of the office holding elite, the *shi*. Further, it may also be significant that they all date **(p.289)** from the latter part of the Eastern Han period, the second century CE. Of course, if we are trying to compare the roles played by visual art in ethical formation in Classical Athens and early Imperial China, this raises the question of how far our ability to compare like with like is compromised by the surviving evidence, since we are focusing on state art in the case of Athens, privately commissioned funerary monuments in the case of the Chinese material. As I shall suggest in the conclusion of the essay, however, the relationship between state art and private funerary art may in fact be just one more telling indicator of the distinctive character of the moral agency of narrative art, and especially of tyrannicide imagery, in Classical Athens and early imperial China.

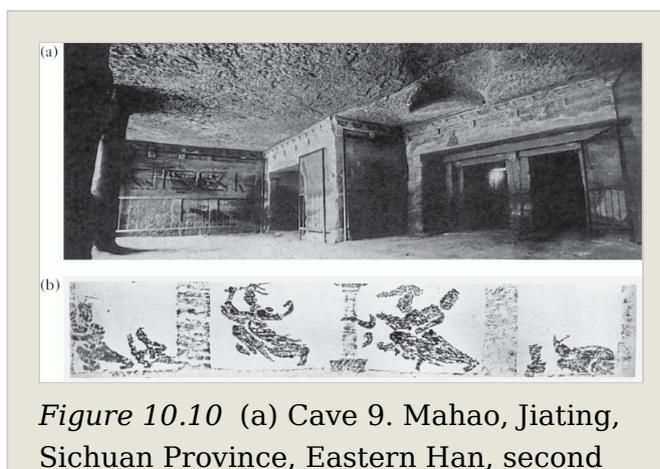


Figure 10.10 (a) Cave 9. Mahao, Jiating, Sichuan Province, Eastern Han, second

Next to no material evidence survives of the pictorial art that decorated the palaces of the emperors of China and other members of the ruling dynasty.⁶⁰ We do know from literary sources, however, that those palaces housed quite elaborate programs of paintings of personalities and events from history, including early tyrannical figures such as Jie, Zhou, and You, the last kings of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. A prose poem, written in the early second century CE by Wang Wenkao, describes the (p.290) decoration of the “Hall of Numinous Brilliance,” built by the Han king Liu Yu, King Gong of Lu, in the middle of the second century BCE. Along with elaborate carvings of prowling tigers and leaping dragons enriching the columns and rafters of the hall, the poet describes a program of wall paintings that illustrated the history of the world from its beginnings:

century CE. Photo after *Kaogu* 1990.2, plate 2.

(b) Jing Ke and the King of Qin. Rubbing from funerary relief from Cave 9. Mahao, Jiating, Sichuan Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. After Wen You, *Sichuan Handai Huaxiang Xuanji* (Shanghai, 1955), plate 55.



Figure 10.11 (a) Jing Ke and the King of Qin. Rubbing of a funerary relief. Hezhuan, Sichuan Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. Source: *Wenwu* 1977.2, p. 66, fig. 12.

(b) Jing Ke and the King of Qin. Rubbing of a relief on an anonymous *que*. Wangjiaping, Eastern Han, second century CE. Source: Xu Wenbin (1992) *Sichuan Handai Shique*, 151, fig. 241. Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe.

Above they record the Opening of Chaos,/ The beginnings of remote antiquity (上紀開闢/遂古之初) . . . [through the (mythological) Nine Sovereigns, to stories of more recent times] . . . Last come the Three Tyrants (三后),/ Depraved consorts, misguided rulers,/ Loyal statesmen, filial sons,/virtuous *shi* (烈士), chaste women,/ Worthies and fools, the failed and accomplished,/None have gone unattested./ The wicked are warnings to the world (惡以誡世), /The good are examples for posterity (善以示後). (ll. 160-8; trans. Knechtges and Xiao 1987, 275)

The vocabulary used by Wang Wenkao echoes that of history writing and indicates that he, at least, viewed the paintings as pictorial history, or more specifically “pictorial records of the past,” parallel to those transmitted in texts by royal scribes and annalists. It was a topos of Han thought that history offered a guide to ethical and prudent conduct and thus served as a kind of moral mirror. Furthermore, that topos is often illustrated specifically in relation to the inadequate self-scrutiny of these last rulers of dynasties that **(p.291)** fall as a result of those rulers’ various forms of autocratic conduct: “the Yin [i.e., Shang] could have used the Xia as a mirror, and the Zhou could have used the Yin [Shang] as a mirror (故殷可以鑒於夏，而周可以鑒於殷).”⁶¹ These programs of paintings sometimes decorated reception rooms, but they also decorated more personal objects such as screens and handscrolls designed for the use, and self-reflection, of members of the court and the imperial family. Importantly for our purposes, there is substantial evidence that the stories selected for these moral mirrors were chosen by the *shi*, members of the same office-holding elite who were the patrons of the tombs and funerary shrines that we have been examining.⁶²

Against this background, it is worth looking at some of the other stories with which that of Jing Ke was combined in second-century funerary art. One of the more popular stories to figure alongside that of Jing Ke on these shrines is that of the Duke of Zhou (11th century BCE), as seen, for example, on one of the towers (que) of the Gao Yi cemetery (fig. 10.12a-b) and a panel from one of the Songshan shrines, which shows the same scene more clearly (fig. 10.13a). The Duke of Zhou had long been seen as a model minister and official by the *shi*. On the death of King Wu, the conqueror of the Shang and founder of the Zhou Dynasty, his brother the Duke of Zhou took on the role of regent for his young nephew, King Cheng.

In these scenes, the child king Cheng is placed in the center, standing on a podium, facing forward with a crown on his head. To either side he is flanked by officials inclining from the waist or prostrating themselves in an expression of respect. To the king's immediate left, one official holds a protective parasol over his head, while on his right the Duke of Zhou reports to the king concerning his conduct of official business, treating him with exactly the same ritual respect and propriety as would be appropriate to an adult emperor. In his history of the Western Han, Ban Gu relates that the Emperor Wu, nearing death, presented a painting of King Cheng and the Duke of Zhou to his minister Huo Guang (131–68 BCE) as an intimation that he was to act in a similar way on behalf of emperor's eight-year-old son, Liu Fuling, who he was designating as successor.⁶³

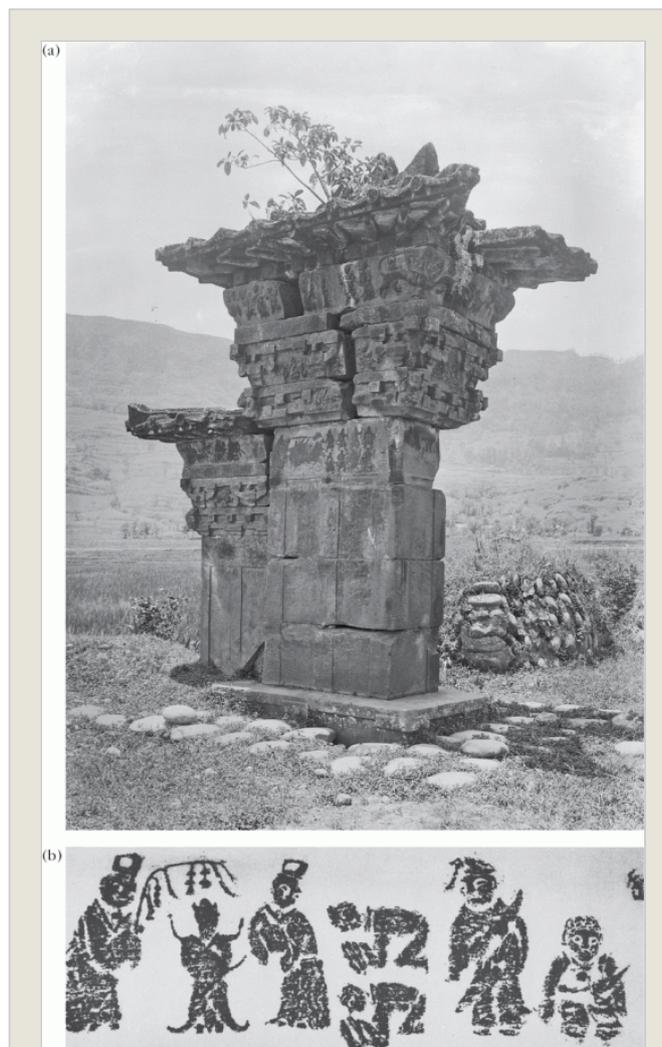


Figure 10.12 (a) Funerary shrine in the Gao Yi cemetery. Sichuan Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. Victor Segalen (1978), *The Grand Statuary of China*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, plate 10. Photo © Musée Guimet, Paris, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image musée Guimet.

(b) King Cheng and the Duke of Zhou. Rubbing from a relief on a funerary shrine in the Gao Yi cemetery. Sichuan Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. Source: Xu Wenbin (1992) *Sichuan Handai Shique*, p. 106, fig. 90. Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe.

The funerary context in which these images were to be seen significantly shaped the ways in which they acted as ethical exemplars from (p.292) (p.293) both an institutional and a material point of view. Funerals of scholars and officials were a major focus for the articulation of *shi* identity. Colleagues, friends, and former fellow-students of the deceased traveled long distances to participate in memorial celebrations and contributed to the erection of memorial tablets.⁶⁴ At the *la* sacrifice, the deceased's ancestors were invoked, and his own *hun* soul was the recipient of offerings welcoming it to the shine as its new

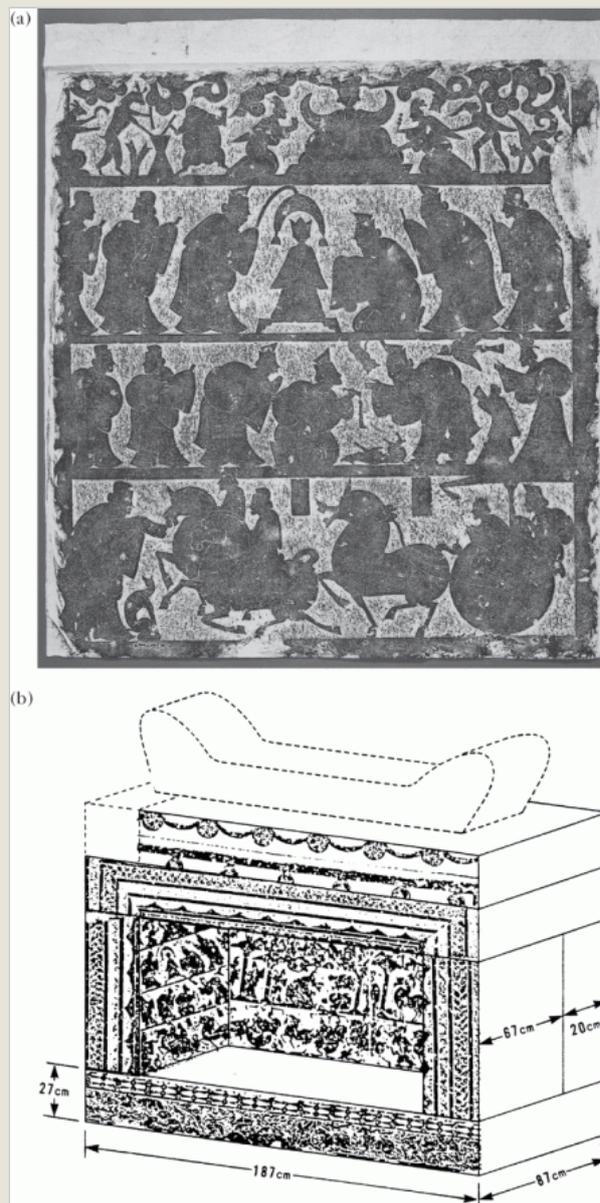


Figure 10.13 (a) King Cheng and the Duke of Zhou, and other scenes. Rubbing after relief from funerary shrine. Songshan, Shandong Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. Top register: Queen Mother of the West. Second register: King Cheng and the Duke of Zhou. Third register: Liji and the death of Shen Sheng. Fourth register: Chariot procession and reception. Image: with permission of the Royal Ontario Museum © ROM.

abode. This sacrifice was specifically intended, in the words of the Book of

(b) Reconstruction of funerary shrine from Songshan, Shandong Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. After Wu Hung (1989), figure 42.

Rites (*Li Ji*), to “rectify the relation between rulers and ministers” as well as to establish harmony in family relations and to “adjust the relations between high and low.”⁶⁵ Against this background, it is difficult not to see the popularity of images such as the Duke of Zhou and Jing Ke’s attempt on the life of the king of Qin as ethical commentary on the current situation in general and more specifically on the manipulation of the government by consort families of child emperors and by the eunuchs of the inner court, who used their guardianship of and access to these child emperors to bypass the *shi* officials of the outer court in the conduct of government.⁶⁶

Furthermore, both the concept of history as a moral mirror and the design of the shrines shaped a very specific kind of ethical engagement with the narratives. The Chinese character *jian* (鑒) as a noun means “mirror,” as a verb “to scrutinize.” The base of the character 鑒 is the root or “radical” that signifies metal; on top of it is the homophone 監, indicating a man lying down and looking into a sacrificial vessel, probably filled with water, and indicating self-scrutiny of a divinatory character—as it appears in the Shang oracle bones.⁶⁷ Used in relation to history, *jian* implies a close and critical scrutiny, a kind of deep divinatory viewing of the patterns of the past in order to construe the events of the future. Ideally, this makes it possible to anticipate and avert disaster by applying the lessons of the past in the present, specifically through moral rectification of oneself and moral admonition of one’s colleagues and superiors. Even in the case of **(p.294)** the largest surviving Han funerary shrine, the Xiaotangshan, the viewer needs to kneel to view the pictures. It is hard to imagine more than one viewer at a time looking at smaller shrines, like those from Songshan (fig. 10.13b). The viewer, kneeling in front of the shrine, making offerings to the deceased (and thus echoing the homage scene that commonly decorated the back wall of shrines), would read the imagery simply by turning his head from right to left, or vice versa, and up and down, like studying a written text, as Wu Hung⁶⁸ has

suggested. This individuated, critical ethical reflection is rather different from the collective theoretic visions that the framing and display of Athenian Tyrannicide imagery afforded, imagery that celebrated and encouraged an unreflective identification with the ethic of liberationist violence that characterized Athenian imperialism.

How might this institutional context help us understand the role being played by images of Jing Ke's attempted assassination of the king of Qin? There is a second scene associated with the First Emperor that is also remarkably popular in this period and that is found in combination both with the story of the Duke of Zhou and with the story of Jing Ke, as, for example, on the First Shrine from the Wu Family cemetery (fig. 10.14). This is the story of the First Emperor's failed attempt to recover the Nine Tripods. According to legend, the Nine Tripods had originally been cast by the Xia, the founding dynasty of China, out of bronze submitted by the nine regions as tribute. Among other miraculous powers, these precious treasures embodied imperial legitimacy.⁶⁹ Shining brightly or fading as the mandate of a dynasty waxed or waned, they had in turn been transmitted from the Xia to the Shang and the Shang to the Zhou, only to be lost in the River Si with the final collapse of the Zhou in 327 BCE. After reunifying China, the First Emperor sent an expedition to the River Si to recover the tripods that had reportedly surfaced. Depictions of this story show imperial officials assembled around some kind of gantry, equipped with pulleys and ropes, whereby they seek to raise one of the tripods. They are, however, thwarted by a dragon, which bites through the rope, leaving the officials to fall over on each other as the tension in the rope disappears. It is that final moment of failure that is featured in pictorial representations of the story. **(p.295)**

(p.296)

On one level, both the pictures of Jing Ke's assassination attempt and those of the attempt to recover the Nine Tripods could be seen as

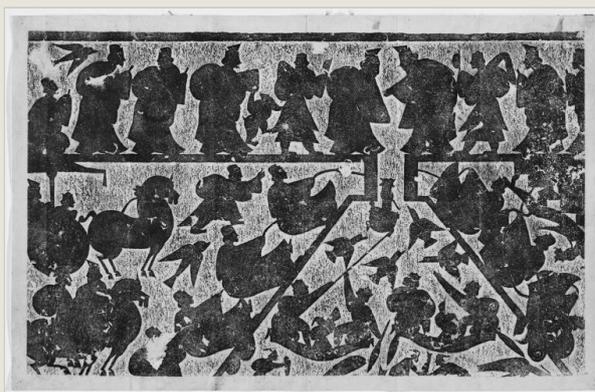


Figure 10.14 The First Emperor failing to recover the Zhou tripods. Rubbing after reliefs on the East Wall, Chamber 2, Wu Family Cemetery. Shandong Province, Eastern Han, second century CE. Image courtesy of Harvard University, Fine Arts Library Special Collections.

manifestations of loyalty to the Han, whose legitimacy partly rested on the claim that the First Emperor was a tyrant who had lost—if he ever held—the mandate to rule. But they also had a critical edge. Part of their appeal—to a *shi* audience—seems to have been the way in which they bring the emperor down to the same level as the *shi*, “who considered themselves ‘teachers and friends’ of the rulers, rather than mere subjects.”⁷⁰ In both cases, the scene is given a distinctly comic treatment hardly consonant with imperial dignity. In the Jing Ke scenes, it is a rather clumsy Qin Shihuangdi who rushes around the column, in flight from Jing Ke; in the tripod scenes, the officials, falling on their bottoms as the rope snaps, bitten through by the dragon, stand in striking contrast to their more conventional representation as embodiments of corporeal propriety, respectfully bowing to their superiors, as in the scenes of the Duke of Zhou and King Cheng. In this way, the images offer a critical response to the increasing autocracy of the late Han emperors—or at least of the consort **(p.297)** families and the eunuchs, who were increasingly authoritarian in monopolization of the reins of power and repression of any criticism or remonstrance on the part of the *shi* officialdom.

Against this horizon, there was no need to elevate the figure of the tyrannicide—or to repress his failure—in the way that is done in the Athenian Tyrannicide monument. On the contrary,

the ineffectuality of Jing Ke adds to the critical point of the image. Jing Ke is in certain respects a rather clownish figure—a marketplace drunkard and serial frog abuser—as well as a lover of books, the latter presumably important to aligning him with *shi* identity.⁷¹ If even Jing Ke can frighten the First Emperor, reducing him to impotent panic, running in circles around a column in his own palace, this does a lot to bring the emperor down to the same level as his subjects, or at least the *shi*. Such a reading would seem to be confirmed by the tripod scene. The unworthiness of the autocratic First Emperor, manifested in particular by his harsh treatment of scholars, might be a mirror for the emperors of the late Han. More significantly, the scene of the loss of the tripods signaled not only that the mandate of heaven was changeable, but also that the age of ritual art had ended and that forms of legitimacy dependent on a purely ritual aura, transmitted within the ancestral line and the ancestral temples of the ruling family, were increasingly displaced by a more publicly accountable moral authority, which the *shi* were best placed to judge.

Tyrannicides and Politics, Ancient and Modern

The imagery of tyrannicide seems to have been particularly good to think with in Han China and in Classical Athens, as a way of figuring the limits of legitimate power and the ethical basis for, and significance of, violent resistance to despotic power and its overthrow in the context of the new political orders that were being constructed in both historical contexts. In the Greek case, striking visual analogies in iconography compel the viewer to draw parallels between Theseus, the Tyrannicides, and Callimachus at Marathon, and suggest implicit comparisons with other myths and contemporary events. Similar comparisons are built into the structure of Han funerary shrines, with their multiple scenes, although they are more subtle—or at least require the viewer to exercise a little more critical reflection—in making visual and ethical parallels or contrasts between **(p.298)** scenes (for example, the dignity of King Cheng and the Duke of Zhou, as opposed to the rather chaotic scenes of the king of Qin running round the column, and his emissaries fishing for tripods all falling over on their backsides). Interestingly, the ethical sensibilities are in certain respects the reverse of what one might expect, according to our conventional stereotypes, from monarchic China and democratic Athens. The imagery of tyrannicide in Athens seems deeply authoritarian, promoting an unreflective

identification with and legitimation of any kind of violence conducive to the freedom of Athens, whatever the internal or external repression that might entail. By contrast, the tyrannicide imagery of China, holding up the past as a warning to emperors who overstep the bounds of their position, seems to encourage critical thought about state power with an interestingly antiauthoritarian orientation.

We should take care, however, not simply to reverse the old stereotypes and replace the open society of Athens and Chinese oriental despotism with critical Chinese and authoritarian Athenians, a new essentialist contrast of mentalities. The imagery of the Tyrannicides was subject to contestation, most notably in Thucydides' famous excursus (6.53–9), but also in other contexts. A vase of the 470s (by the painter Syriskos) that seems to show revelers drunkenly acting out the gestures of the Tyrannicides suggests that the Tyrannicides may have been the targets of mockery at the symposia of citizens with oligarchic sympathies.⁷² Interestingly, there was also a law against naming one's slaves after the Tyrannicides or slandering them; this law was passed in the late fifth or early fourth century BCE, following oligarchic counterrevolutions against democracy.⁷³

That said, much of this contestation merely seeks to denigrate the Tyrannicides, rather than developing a sustained critical vision of Athenian democratic state power, at least in visual art. One interesting example of a tombstone used to develop an openly critical orientation to existing state power is a memorial attested for Critias, one of the so-called Thirty Tyrants who led an oligarchic coup in Athens in 404–3 BCE. This pictured personified Oligarchia, equipped with a flaming torch, setting fire to *Demokratia*. The epigram accompanying the image proclaimed: "This is the memorial of good men (*andres agathoi*), who for a short while restrained (**p.299**) the hubris of the accursed demos."⁷⁴ Critias' monument is, however, exceptional in its critical orientation to the authority of the *demos* as the ruling power in the state. More generally, the Athenian elite seem to have used funerary representation to project a positive image of themselves within the parameters of the more affirmative terms of the shared civic culture defined by state art, including tyrannicidal iconography. A number of late-fifth- and early-fourth-century Attic funerary stelae depict the deceased as a hoplite assuming the posture of Harmodius and striking down an

enemy warrior, thus aligning the deceased's military service, and perhaps his death in battle, with the willing self-sacrifice of the Tyrannicides in preserving Athenian liberty.⁷⁵

One particularly telling use of tyrannicide imagery occurs at the cenotaph in honor of Dexileos, set up in the Kerameikos cemetery in the early fourth century.⁷⁶ Dexileos, a young Athenian cavalryman, had fallen in battle, either at Corinth or Coroneia, in 394/3 BCE. The stele depicts him in triumph, his horse rearing above a fallen enemy. Unusually, the inscription mentions Dexileos' birth date, 414/3 BCE, as well as his death date, seemingly seeking to distance him from the disrepute acquired by the cavalry in 404/3 BCE, when they were largely complicit with the oligarchic coup of the Thirty Tyrants. This message was spelled out more explicitly in one of the vases included amongst the funerary offerings, a red-figure chous, depicting the Tyrannicide statue group in the Agora (fig. 10.15). The young Dexileos, it implies, was a new Harmodius, who had sacrificed himself for the freedom of Athens.

In Athenian art, we may conclude, even in such media as funerary monuments privately commissioned by members of the social elite, there is not the same sustained interest in critical exploration and policing of the limits of state power as characterizes the Han Dynasty funerary art that we have discussed. On the contrary, the



Figure 10.15 Red-figure pitcher (oenochoe) with depiction of the Tyrannicide Group. Painted in Athens, ca. 400 BCE. Boston Museum of Fine Arts. 98.936. Photograph © 2018 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

affirmative message of state art was enthusiastically embraced as an expression of positive and unequivocal commitment to the legitimate authority of the Athenian democratic state.

The difference between the two cases cannot be interpreted as the manifestation of distinctive cultural mentalities. Nor can it be taken as any straightforward reflection of differences in political organization—**(p.300)** notwithstanding their significance—since in certain respects, the ways in which tyrannicide imagery is used in the two cases seem counterintuitive. Political organization clearly informs the character and use of Greek and Chinese concepts and images of tyrants and tyrannicides, but explanatory weight must also be attributed to the historical conjunctures within which the characteristic institutions of art in each tradition developed. The relevant factors include the level of the development of ethical thought in each tradition, at the time when it became closely integrated with traditions of visual art, and the continuing importance of the characteristics of those traditions that resulted from their intimate association in both cases with elites and institutions closely connected with the state.⁷⁷ Critical ethical thought in **(p.301)** Greece, informed by second-order reflection, developed after the crystallization of the dominant traditions of art associated with the state in fifth-century BCE Greece. In the Chinese case, the critical reflections of the *shi*, the elite official class, preceded and significantly informed the character of political art in China, in ways that the ideas of Plato and Aristotle writing in the fourth century BCE never achieved.

An emphasis on the importance of historical conjuncture, and the social processes that shaped the critical or affirmative character of visual art, seems to be confirmed by the fact that as one shifts the temporal boundaries of our cross-cultural comparison, we can find critical self-reflective practices of ethical formation supported in Greco-Roman art, and conversely authoritarian statist traditions in the Chinese case, some with particularly interesting relationships to tyrannicide imagery.⁷⁸ Hellenistic paintings of Medea, for example, depicted contemplating whether or not to kill her own children to take vengeance on their father Jason, explore the relationship between passion and rational self-control, and became a kind of *topos* in Hellenistic philosophy and ekphrastic poetry for exploring the relationship between apparent and true goods. Visual art, like poetry, functions here

as a kind of therapy, in which the viewer or reader “analyzes the mistakes of the character from a position of human sympathy, but emotional distance.”⁷⁹ This is very different from the unreflective political commitment encouraged by Classical Athenian political art, accurately criticized by Plato for the ways in which it undermined rational critical reflexivity.

(p.302) However, this more critically reflexive tradition of ethical art seems to have remained very much something of the private sphere in the Greco-Roman world, while the classical heroic monument as a vehicle for the legitimation of state violence had a long history not only in ancient Greek and Roman art, but also in European art right up into the modern era. One example particularly pertinent to our discussion here is the group “The Worker and the Collective Farm Woman” by the Russian sculptor Vera Mukhina (fig. 10.16). This towering (25-meter-high) group was created to crown the Soviet Pavilion at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1937. Its two figures are symmetrical reflections of the Harmodius statue from the Tyrannicide group in Naples (cf. fig. 10.1), the worker holding a hammer and the collective farm girl a sickle in place of Harmodius’ sword. The whole monument symbolized the Soviet Union’s vocation as the vindicator of popular liberty and the opponent of tyranny, particularly as represented by the contemporary Nazi regime in Germany, whose pavilion, topped by an eagle, faced the Soviet pavilion in the park of the Universal Exhibition.⁸⁰

So compelling was the link between classicizing monuments and self-projection of states in the twentieth century that even modern Chinese political sculpture emulated the aesthetic of liberationist violence inaugurated by the Athenian Tyrannicide monument.⁸¹ The Monument of the People's Heroes in Tiananmen



Figure 10.16 Vera Mukhina, *Worker and Collective Farm Woman*. Soviet Pavilion at the Universal Exhibition in Paris, 1937. Photo: akg-images Ltd.

Square was built between 1949 and 1958 to celebrate the foundation of the People's Republic of China. It takes the form of a massive (38-meter-high) granite obelisk, embellished on the north side—facing the tribune of the Tian An Gate into the Forbidden City, from which Mao declared the inauguration of the People's Republic—with a massive engraved calligraphy by Chairman Mao: "The People's Heroes Are Immortal."⁸² Around the base of the obelisk, a series of reliefs carved in marble, designed by the sculptor Liu Kai-qu, "depict the revolutionary struggles of the Chinese people during the last hundred years."⁸³ Ten key moments in the history of the revolutionary struggle are shown, starting **(p.303)** **(p.304)** with a scene of Chinese burning opium in resistance to the British during the Opium War, progressing to the Wuchang Uprising of 1911, which inaugurated the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty, and the

War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. On the south side the images are framed by an epitaph, composed by Mao and in the calligraphy of Zhou Enlai:

Eternal glory to the people's heroes, who sacrificed their lives in the people's war of liberation and the people's revolution over the past three years . . . Eternal glory to the people's heroes, who, from 1840 sacrificed their lives in the struggles against domestic and foreign enemies to preserve the nation's independence and the people's freedom and well-being.⁸⁴

The culminating scene (fig. 10.17), placed again on the privileged north side of the obelisk, shows the climactic moment of the People's War of Liberation, "the victorious crossing of the Yangtse by the People's Liberation Army in April 1949 and the liberation of Nanking" (the capital of Republican China and the seat of the Guomindang government led by Chiang Kai-shek⁸⁵). The officer leading the troops is, in his pose, strikingly reminiscent of Harmodius from the Tyrannicide group, although the weapon raised up in his right hand is not the sword of Harmodius but a flare pistol, indicating the night operation that the crossing of the Yangtze involved. It is unlikely that Liu Kai-qu had Harmodius specifically in mind, but he almost certainly was deliberately echoing Vera (p.305) Mukhina's famous group from the Paris Exposition. A reduced-size reproduction of Mukhina's statue had been displayed at a major exhibition of the achievements of the Soviet Union held in Beijing in 1954. Along with other examples of Soviet socialist realism, it so impressed Liu Kai-qu that he wrote an article for the People's Daily with the title "Let's Learn from Soviet Sculpture," which he regarded as the embodiment of the social, ethical, and spiritual superiority of the Soviet system.⁸⁶

This echo of Mukhina's "Worker and Collective Farm Woman," and derivatively of the Critius'

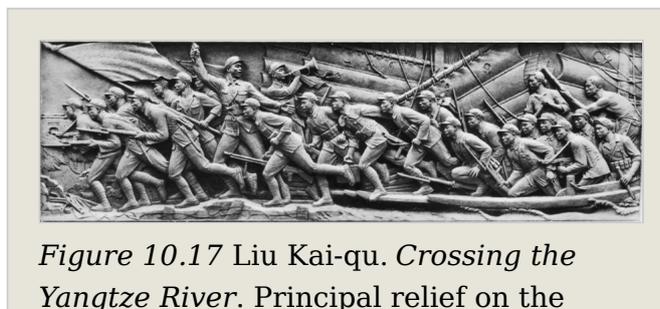


Figure 10.17 Liu Kai-qu. *Crossing the Yangtze River*. Principal relief on the

and Nesioties' Tyrannicides, seems even stronger in the four groups of sculpture that flank Chairman Mao's mausoleum,

which was completed in 1977.

Monument to the People's Heroes. Beijing, 1958. Photo: Courtesy of Wu Hung.

According to an official

publication, the group to the east of the north entrance "stands for the new democratic revolution."⁸⁷ Like the Athenian Tyrannicide group, this monument constructs a specific official (and comparably tendentious) history of the triumph of liberty in modern China, effected through the agency of the Communist Party (under the guidance of Chairman Mao, visibly present in a commemorative relief portrait above the figures). The moments depicted include the creation of a revolutionary base in the Jinggang Mountains, the Long March, the anti-Japanese war, and finally the struggle of "the People's Liberation Army which, led by Chairman Mao, destroyed the Chiang Kai-shek government, the last reactionary regime in Chinese history."⁸⁸ At the head of the more than thirty figures comprising the complete monument stands a soldier raising his rifle in the air alongside a worker clad in overalls (fig. 10.18), strikingly reminiscent of Vera Mukhina's statue group of 1937, and entirely parallel with it in terms of the theme of emancipation through sacrifice and struggle on the part of the People, both warriors and workers, required for the freedom from tyranny afforded by communism.⁸⁹ **(p.306)**

(p.307)

Like the Tyrannicide monument in the Athenian Agora, though for rather different reasons, neither of these monuments shows the enemy against whom the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army were fighting.⁹⁰ Why? Because ultimately the enemies from whom China had been liberated in the wars immediately preceding the foundation of the People's Republic were, in fact, Chinese.

More specifically, the enemy in question was Chiang Kai-shek and the Republicans, previously the allies of Mao and his followers in the War of Resistance against the Japanese. (Indeed, at the time these monuments were created, the Republican government led by Chiang Kai-Shek and his successors had fled to Taiwan but were still claiming to be the legitimate government of China, with aspirations to liberate China from Communist tyranny, as they and their American allies saw it.) Like their Athenian counterparts, the visual strategies of these



Figure 10.18 Detail from statue group outside the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall. Tiananmen Square, Beijing. 1978. After John T. Young (1999) *Contemporary Public Art in China*, p. 22. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Photo © John T. Young.

modern Chinese heroic monuments celebrate and legitimate the acts of violence that informed the creation of the People's Republic of China, and they do so only by repressing certain uncomfortable historical contradictions and discouraging critical reflection on them.⁹¹

The involvement of the People's Liberation Army in the forcible suppression of the democracy movement in Tiananmen Square in 1989 was perfectly congruent with the ethics and aesthetics of emancipatory violence implicit in the sculptures that decorate the square. The People's Liberation Army was, from the perspective of those running the Chinese government at the time, simply suppressing reactionary counterrevolutionaries, enemies of the People.

What about the protesters of the pro-democracy movement? A plaster Democracy Goddess, erected in Tiananmen Square and modeled loosely after the Statue of Liberty, clearly drew on Western idioms.⁹² But the classical Chinese traditions of imagining tyrannicide that have been the focus of my discussion in this chapter also played their role. At Peking University, protesting students processed around their campus, picking up further support for their march to Tiananmen. As they did so, some students stopped to paste up posters on the campus walls, conventional **(p.308)** sites of political protest. Some of these posters broadcast the slogans of the day, celebrating freedom and democracy and criticizing the Chinese Communist Party. Some of the students, however, anticipating the likely outcome of the protests, pasted up posters on which they had copied the song of Jing Ke, chanted as he set out on his equally ill-fated journey to assassinate the despotic king of Qin:⁹³

風蕭蕭兮 *Xiao Xiao* cries the wind

易水寒 *Yi* waters are cold

壯士一去兮 *Brave men*, once gone

不復還 *Never* come back

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Notes:

(1.) Thuc. 6.53–9; cf. 1.20; Thomas 1989, 243–4.

(2.) Cartledge 1985, 20.

(3.) The challenges of comparing ancient Greece and China have been addressed most extensively in the work of Geoffrey Lloyd (e.g. 1996 and 2002, of which the first chapter examines history writing in ancient Greece and China).

(4.) Kristeller 1990; Porter 2009; Tanner 2010.

(5.) Defoort 2001, 2006; Tanner 2009, 94–7.

(6.) O. Murray 1980, 132–44; Fadinger 1993.

(7.) K. A. Morgan 2003.

(8.) Azoulay 2014, 47–8; see below for further discussion.

(9.) Hsiao 1979, 384.

(10.) *Mencius* II.i.2.11; Legge 1991, 184.

(11.) Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from ancient sources are my own.

(12.) Ober 2003, 222–6; Raaflaub 2003, 72.

(13.) Ober 2003, 229.

(14.) Hsiao 1979, 494–5.

(15.) *Records of the Historian*; Pines 2008a, 3–7; Watson 1969, 45–67 trans.

(16.) Wang 1994, 531; Lewis 2006, 70.

(17.) Pines 2008a, 1–9, on which the following paragraph is based, contains a full discussion of the relevant literary and cinematographic sources up to the modern era.

(18.) Hsiao 1979, 440.

- (19.) Pines 2014, 228.
- (20.) Pines 2014, 228.
- (21.) Pines 2014, 228, 232.
- (22.) Liu Xie *Wenxin Dialong* IX; Shih 1970, 72.
- (23.) Pines 2008a, 6–19.
- (24.) Pines 2008a, 7.
- (25.) Pines 20008a, 6–7.
- (26.) Estimate based on the catalogue of Finsterbusch (1966–2004).
- (27.) Thomas 1989, 257–61.
- (28.) Standard accounts of the Tyrannicide group on which I draw are Brunnsåker 1971; Taylor 1981; Fehr 1984. Important recent contributions include Ober 2003 and Azoulay 2014. The original bronze statue group by Critius and Nesiotes survives only in the form of Roman copies, and the exact reconstruction is the subject of ongoing debate, as discussed in the cited sources. The Naples version is the best surviving copy, although the sword-bearing hand of the figure of Harmodius should be bent back at the elbow, over his head, similar to the figure of Theseus slaying Skiron on the Codros Painter's cup (fig. 10.7); see Neer 2010, 78–84, fig. 39 for a plaster-cast reconstruction of the likely appearance. The group by Critius and Nesiotes replaced an earlier monument by the sculptor Antenor, the appearance of which is unknown.
- (29.) The gesture interestingly echoes that used in vase-painting for depictions of Apollo in the context of the Gigantomachy, suggesting a parallelism between Apollo's punishment of hubris and Harmodius and Aristogeiton's suppression of tyranny (Carpenter 1997; Azoulay 2014, 64).
- (30.) Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 58.1; Shear 2012a, b.
- (31.) Ober 2003, 219–21.
- (32.) cf. Thuc. 6.60.1; Ober 2003, 216.

(33.) Hipparchus is named in an inscription on what was probably the statue base, an epigram by Simonides, but this also elides the temporal gap between the murder of Hipparchus and the overthrow of the tyranny (Neer 2010, 82).

(34.) As claimed, of course, by Pl. [*Hipparch.*] 229B, probably written in the early fourth century. Cf. Azoulay 2014, 118–19. The possibility of Peisistratus' as presiding over a Golden Age is discussed in Greenwood's contribution to this volume.

(35.) Azoulay 2014.

(36.) Brunnsåker 1971, 125–35; Taylor 1981, 16–18; Azoulay 2014, 56–7.

(37.) Connor 1970, 158–60; Castriota 1992, 33.

(38.) *Eur. Suppl.* 346–58, 399–408; Connor 1970, 151–2.

(39.) Barron 1972; Castriota 1992, 37–58.

(40.) Barron 1972; Woodford 1974.

(41.) C. H. Morgan 1962; Connor 1970, 153–5; Azoulay 2014, 251–3.

(42.) Henle 1973, 80–2; Tanner 2006, 184–5; Azoulay 2014, 253–4.

(43.) Castriota 1992, 76–89.

(44.) Harrison 1972; Stansbury-O'Donnell 2005.

(45.) Here and in the following paragraphs I draw on an earlier discussion, published in Tanner 2018.

(46.) Harrison 1972, 353–5. Azoulay (2014, 335), following Carpenter (1997), makes the argument that one can only identify an allusion to the Tyrannicides when both members of the group are shown; otherwise there is no reason to suppose that the gesture alludes to the Tyrannicide group rather than Apollo. He therefore discounts both Harrison’s reading of the temple of Athena Nike south frieze and Barron’s (1972) of the west pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, and the frieze on the krater by the painter of the Woolly Satyrs (fig. 10.6). This criticism does not seem to me persuasive. The status of the Tyrannicide group and its frequent evocations in Athenian sculpture and vase-painting, most notably in Theseus cycles are likely to have at least in part overwritten the original linkage of the Harmodius pose with Apollo. Indeed, Harmodius’ gesture was so instantly recognizable that it could be imitated by the chorus leader in Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 631–4, 672–80—striking a Tyrannicidal blow against the upstart women who threatened (male) democracy—with the confident expectation that the allusion would be understood by the audience (Ober 2003, 220–1 on the Harmodius stance as a synecdoche “for the monument, the event, and its imagined narrative continuation”).

(47.) Stewart 1985, 62.

(48.) Loraux 1986, 98–118.

(49.) Plut. *Thes.* 27; Connor 1970, 157.

(50.) Lippman, Scahill, and Schultz 2006; Schultz 2009.

(51.) Lippman, Scahill, and Schultz 2006, 554–9.

(52.) Schultz 2009, 142–6.

(53.) Loraux 1986, 67.

(54.) Stewart 1985; Schultz 2009.

(55.) Azoulay 2014, 249–50.

(56.) Nightingale 2001, in which vision and *theoria* are discussed in detail. Nightingale argues for a restriction of theoretic vision to *theoria* proper—pilgrimages abroad to experience the festivals of other cities—and its metaphorical extension to philosophic vision. While her criticisms of arguments that extend theoretic vision even to the spectacles of the theater of Dionysus are well taken (2004, 49–52), there is, I think, more metaphorical leakage into other domains than she allows, and theoretic vision seems particularly relevant to the strongly religious framing of the depictions of history on the temple of Athena Nike. It is also worth bearing in mind that for one significant category of viewers, representatives of subject cities in Athens' empire coming to participate in the Panathenaia and presenting their tribute of bull and armor (cf. the trophies and bulls of the Nike balustrade immediately below the Nike temple), their viewing would have been “theoretic” in the more restricted sense of the term (cf. Nightingale 2004, 54–60).

(57.) Thuc 2.43; trans. Stewart 1997, 83.

(58.) Neer 2010, 81–2 quoting Simonides, *SEG* 10, 320; trans. modified.

(59.) Finsterbusch I.71, 85, 324, 463; III.A84, A252, E400, I17, O22, IV.B122; this is not a complete list, since she does not include the three examples on the Wu family shrines (C. Liu, Nyman, and Barbieri-Low 2005, stones 1.6—Chamber 1, 1.23 Chamber 2, 1.35 Chamber 3—Wu Liang Shrine), a second example from the Mahao tombs in Sichuan (Rudolph and Yu 1951, 19; Tang 1997), or the scene on the Wangjiaping Que in Sichuan (Xu 1992, 44–5, figure 241; Paludan 1991, 36, incorrectly identified as being the Gao Yi Que).

(60.) I draw here, and in the immediately following paragraphs, on an earlier discussion of some of the same materials in Tanner 2018.

(61.) *Han shi wai zhuan* VI.19; trans. Hightower 1952, 178–9.

(62.) Barbieri-Low 2007, 196; J. K. Murray 2007, 33.

(63.) *Han Shu* 68.2932; Powers 1991, 209–10.

(64.) Powers 1991, 97–103.

(65.) James 1996, 106-7; Legge 1885, 27.369-72.

(66.) Powers 1991, 206-10.

(67.) Huang 1995, 76. The links between mirroring, history, and divinatory prognostication are also apparent in a saying of Mozi, quoted in the *Shiji* 79/47: “I have said that he who looks into water will see the form of his face, but he who looks at men will know fortune (*ji* 吉) and misfortune (*xiong*凶),” invoking the terminology of divination, as discussed by Watson (1958, 136). The character for “fortune” appropriately enough shows words from the mouth of a *shi*/scholar.

(68.) Wu 1989, 142-3.

(69.) Marsili 2005.

(70.) Pines 2008a, 24.

(71.) Pines 2008a, 5-7.

(72.) Neer 2002, 70.

(73.) Thomas 1989, 254; Ober 2003, 221; Azoulay 2014, 72-4, 98-100.

(74.) DK 88A13, scholion to Aeschin. *In Tim.*; trans. Ober 2003, 235-6.

(75.) Clairmont 1993, 2.157, 2.217; Ober 2003, 237.

(76.) Vermeule 1970; Ober 2003, 239-43; Azoulay 2014, 109-113, 142-6.

(77.) The question of conjuncture could fruitfully be analyzed at much greater length in the cases of both traditions of tyrannicide imagery. While we are not sure when the iconography of the Jing Ke scene was first created, its popularity is very much a phenomenon of the later Eastern Han period, when the *shi*, the elite officialdom who were the sponsors of this imagery, found themselves marginalized in the government of the empire by palace insiders, in particular the consort families of emperors who were minors and their eunuch attendants (Powers 1991, 206-23). Comparably, the reuse of tyrannicide imagery, both negatively and positively, seems to be particularly salient in Athens in periods immediately surrounding oligarchic coups in which the

democracy was overthrown and then restored (Ober 2003, 225–6; Azoulay 2014, 82–61, 105–13). Imagery did not just reflect distinctive political ideologies, but also lent itself to strategic use by political actors, with varying relations to the state, in addressing and intervening in specific historical conjunctures, whether constructing the putatively emancipatory hegemony of the Athenian empire or seeking to rein in the autocratic tendencies of the imperial families of the late Eastern Han period.

(78.) There is of course a wealth of material that one could explore to look at the ways in which visual art supported authoritarian state power in many different periods of Chinese art: funerary monuments, temples, portraits, etc. My manifestly not very representative selection of material in what follows is determined by my specific focus in this chapter on depictions of tyrannicide, not art and state power in general.

(79.) Gutzwiller 2004, 356–60, quotation 359.

(80.) Fehr 1984, 54–63; Azoulay 2014, 227–31.

(81.) It is an interesting question to what extent this link between classicism and state power, and in particular the aestheticization of state violence, is an intrinsic one, to what extent a historically contingent one, dependent on the hegemonic status of “the classical” in the international field of political art in the twentieth century. But this is not a question into which I can inquire here.

(82.) K. Liu 1958, 15; Laing 1988, 91–2; Hung 2001.

(83.) K. Liu 1958, 15.

(84.) Hung 2001, 463.

(85.) K. Liu 1958, 16.

(86.) Hung 2001, 469.

(87.) China Reconstructs Editorial Team 1977, 6.

(88.) China Reconstructs Editorial Team 1977, 6.

(89.) Good images of this monument can be found in China Reconstructs Editorial Team 1977. For discussion of this monument, see also Chi 1978; Laing 1988, 92–3. A group on the west side “portrays members of the three armed forces and militiamen of different nationalities, who have turned their grief into strength to guard our motherland and who are prepared to liberate Taiwan” (Chi 1978, 116). Here too, the iconography is clearly indebted to Mukhina’s 1937 group, and thus ultimately to Critius and Nesiotes’ Tyrannicides. For an illustration, see Chi 1978, 115.

(90.) Hung 2001, 471.

(91.) Of course, there is nothing specially Chinese, or even Communist, about this; on the contrary, it is characteristic of much of the tradition of classicizing heroic monumental sculpture developed in Europe after the Renaissance and employed in particular in the art of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. See Golomstock 1990.

(92.) Wu 1991, 111.

(93.) Pines 2008a, 31.



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