


The Athenian *demosion sema*, or *mnema*: problems of definitions? De-toponimizing Thuc. 2.34.5 and Paus. 1.29.4

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^{EN} **Abstract.** In Classical times, the Athenian war dead were buried in the suburb of the Kerameikos, within a place which is currently defined, after Thuc. 2.34.5, as *Demosion Sema*, or *Mnema*, as according to Paus. 1.29.4. In the framework of the recent general reassessment of this burial area, which is no longer conceived of as a national military cemetery in a modern sense, but as a more nuanced “space for the fallen”, this paper argues that the expressions *demosion sema* (public tomb) and *mnema* (monument) have been arbitrarily taken to refer to the burial area as a whole. In light of a renewed textual analysis of Thucydides’ and Pausanias’ narrative contexts, as well as of a survey of their extant editions and translations, this paper suggests that this “space” did not have a more specific name than the name of the “most beautiful suburb of the city” where it was located, the Kerameikos.

Keywords: Classical Athens; Thucydides; Pausanias; war dead; Kerameikos; civic commemoration

^{ES} El *demosion sema*, o *mnema*, ateniense: ¿problemas de definición? Detoponimizando Thuc. 2.34.5 y Paus. 19.29.4

^{ES} **Resumen.** En la época clásica, los atenienses muertos en la guerra eran enterrados en el suburbio del Kerameikos, dentro de un lugar que actualmente se define, a partir de Thuc. 2.34.5, como *Demosion Sema*, o *Mnema*, según Paus. 1.29.4. En el contexto de la reciente reevaluación general de esta área funeraria, que ya no se concibe como un cementerio militar nacional en el sentido moderno, sino como un más matizado “espacio para los caídos”, este artículo sostiene que las expresiones *demosion sema* (tumba pública) y *mnema* (monumento) se han tomado arbitrariamente para referirse al área funeraria en su conjunto. A la luz de un análisis textual renovado de los contextos narrativos de Tucídides y Pausanias, así como de un estudio de sus ediciones y traducciones existentes, este trabajo sugiere que este “espacio” no tenía un nombre más específico que el nombre del “suburbio más bello de la ciudad” donde se encontraba, el Kerameikos.

Palabras clave: Atenas clásica; Tucídides; Pausanias; muertos de guerra; Kerameikos; conmemoración cívica

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1. Introduction

Much has been written on the Athenian so called *Demosion Sema*, or *Mnema*, and more widely on the commemoration of the war dead in Classical Athens in the past few years. Following the discovery of five *polyandria* in the Outer Kerameikos, and in the wake of the general interest in commemorative issues surrounding war and its aftermath aroused on the occasion of the Centenary of WW1, significantly innovative studies have been published in which crucial issues, such as the location of the burial area, and its own conceptualization as a (non) cemetery in the modern sense, have been thoroughly reassessed. This paper wants to contribute to this lively debate, by focusing on its two current definitions, which are not so foregone as it might seem. To this aim, after briefly introducing the literary and archaeological evidence, this article first resumes the main interpretive trajectories which have been developed in old and new scholarship, and then focuses on the conceptual shift the area has gone through, from a proper modern-sense cemetery to a more nuanced "space for the fallen" (§2). Second, it surveys the occurrences of the words *sema* and *mnema* in 5th and 4th century literature, pointing out that they always refer to single, albeit collective, tombs/monuments, and not to wider areas (§3). Third, it re-reads Thucydides' (§4) and Pausanias' (§5) passages, showing that in both cases the ancient text itself seems to prevent a toponimized reading of the two expressions; moreover, it shows that, on closer inspection, almost no scholar translates *sema* and *mnema* with "cemetery", but sticks to their literal meaning of tomb or monument. Lastly, it suggests that when the Athenians used to refer to the area where the war dead were buried, they simply call it with the name of the "most beautiful suburb of the city" in which they were located: the Kerameikos (§6).

2. The Athenian *Demosion Sema* or *Mnema*: from state cemetery to space for the fallen

According to the *vulgata*, starting from an imprecise time after the Persian wars, the Athenians who died on the battlefield were brought back home and buried in a cemetery in the north western part of the city, in the Outer Kerameikos: this cemetery, which was reserved for public tombs of war casualties and important civic personalities, was called *Demosion Sema*, or *Mnema*, according to the two famous passages by Thucydides (2.34.5: *τιθέασιν οὖν ἐς τὸ δημόσιον σῆμα, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τοῦ καλλίστου προαστείου τῆς πόλεως, καὶ αἰεὶ ἐν αὐτῷ θάπτουσι τοὺς ἐκ τῶν πολέμων, πλὴν γε τοὺς ἐν Μαραθῶνι*) and Pausanias (1.29.4: *ἔστι δὲ καὶ πᾶσι μνήμα Ἀθηναίοις* ὁπόσοις ἀποθανεῖν συνέπεσεν ἐν τε ναυμαχίαις καὶ ἐν μάχαις πεζαῖς πλὴν ὅσοι Μαραθῶνι αὐτῶν ἠγωνίσαντο). Pausanias' *Mnema*, capitalized, is thought to be synonymous to Plato's *mnema* (*Menex.* 242b-c: οὔτοι δὴ πρῶτοι μετὰ τὸν Περσικὸν πόλεμον, Ἕλλησιν ἤδη ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐλευθερίας βοηθοῦντες πρὸς Ἕλληνας, ἄνδρες ἀγαθοὶ γενόμενοι καὶ ἐλευθερώσαντες οἷς ἐβοήθουν, ἐν τῷδε τῷ μνήματι τιμηθέντες ὑπὸ τῆς πόλεως πρῶτοι ἐτέθησαν) and *taphos* (*Menex.* 234c: καὶ μὴν, ὦ Μενέξενε, πολλαχῆ κινδυνεύει καλὸν εἶναι τὸ ἐν πολέμῳ ἀποθνήσκειν. καὶ γὰρ ταφῆς καλῆς τε καὶ μεγαλοπρεποῦς τυγχάνει). Another alleged synonym which is often thought to indicate the area as a whole is *Polyandreion*, which appears in 2nd-century BC ephobic decrees.¹

¹ /IG II² 1006.22 (122/1 BC): ἐποιήσαντο δὲ καὶ τοῖς Ἐπιταφίοις δρό[μο]ν ἐν ὄπλοις τὸν τε ἀπὸ τοῦ πολυανδρείου καὶ τ[οὺς ἄλλους] τοὺς καθή[κοντα]ς, καὶ ἀπεδείξαντο ἐν ταῖς ὄπλοις τοῖς τε Θησειοῖς καὶ Ἐπιταφίοις; /IG II² 1,

That the area surrounding the Academy Road accommodated a number of public tombs of war dead, ranging from post-Persian to late Hellenistic times, is clear enough from the archaeological evidence and Pausanias himself, therefore cannot be disputed.² On this basis, scholars such as Travlos and Clairmont introduced the idea that the *Demosion Sema*, or *Mnema*, *vel sim.*, was a national war cemetery, analogous to modern ones: a well-defined space – topographically, functionally, and juridically–, where the war dead were systematically buried at public expense.³ Most recently, more nuanced readings have been advanced, claiming for a correct historical contextualization and differentiation of ancient and modern phenomena, and disputing the interpretation of the area as an archetype of modern national military cemeteries. Several arguments have been called upon to this regard,⁴ concerning its genesis (by custom, not by law);⁵ topography (it was a porous, not bounded space);⁶ internal organization of space (tombs were spread out, not geometrically organized);⁷ functionality (it was a multi-functional area, not at all reserved for war dead but accommodating productive, commercial, ritual, as well as leisure activities);⁸ juridical status (not the polis as a whole, but several agents, including demes, were involved in the administration of space and tombs);⁹ relation with the living (it was neither a peripheral nor isolated area, but a place of everyday transit for Athenian citizens);¹⁰ commemorative concept (it served a multi-polar commemorative function, with private tombs intermixed with public tombs).¹¹ As a result, therefore, it has been argued that the *Demosion sema* was not a modern-sense cemetery at all, but a more nuanced “space for the fallen”, which was somehow recognizable at such, but whose features differed greatly from today’s state war cemeteries.¹² Kostopoulos’ comment might be taken as representative of this renewed interpretation:

Trotzdem kann der in der Forschung allgemein etablierte Begriff *demosion sema* oder “öffentlicher Begräbnisplatz” weiterhin angewendet werden, wenn man ihn eben nicht

1313.17 (175/4 BC): παραγενόμενοι δὲ καὶ εἰς Μα[ραθῶ]να [τό τε] πολυανδρείον ἐστεφάνωσαν καὶ ἐπιτάφιον ἀγῶνα ἐποίησαν, καθάπερ ἐ[πὶ νῦ] [τοῦ] πρὸς τῷ ἄστυ πολυανδρείου γίνεσθαι νόμιμον ἔστιν [...].

² To the literary evidence provided by Pausanias, who records 27 public tombs of the war dead dating from the 60s of the 5th century BC to the 2nd century BC, Clairmont 1983 added some 45 excavated monuments (*IG* I³ 1144 to 1193 bis; *IG* II² 5221 to 5227, dating from 464 BC to 395/4 BC). Two new fragments of casualty lists have been recently discovered (*SEG* 52.60; *SEG* 48.83, and possibly also *SEG* 62.36) as well as five tombs, which were found at *Salaminos Odos* 35 (*ArchDelt* 52, 1997, 52-56; Marchiandi 2014b). For a summary of the literary, epigraphic, and archaeological data see Marchiandi 2014a; Arrington 2015. For the exact location of the “cemetery” for the war dead, which was clarified thanks to the discovery of the abovementioned *polyandria* at *Salaminos Odos* 35, see Arrington 2010.

³ Travlos 1971, 300: “The state burial ground, the *Demosion Sema*, was also called the ‘tomb’ or ‘polyandrion’ or ‘memorial’ or ‘Outer Kerameikos’ or ‘Outer Dromos’”; Clairmont 1983, 29: “various terms are used in ancient Greek to designate the Athenian state cemetery or *Demosion Sema*. Thucydides, the earliest and in many respects most important source besides Pausanias, speaks (2.34) of the δημόσιον σῆμα. Pausanias, some 600 years later, refers (1.29.4) to the πᾶσι μνήμα Ἀθηναίους”. As a sample of most modern readings see Arrington 2015, 66: “Thucydides is the only ancient source to designate the public cemetery with the words *demosion sema*, which occur nowhere else in extant literature. Pausanias, as he begins his description of the war monuments, instead refers to a *mnema* for all those who fell in battle. Like Pausanias, Plato uses the unmodified singular *mnema* to refer to the public cemetery. Although *sema* and *mnema* are most often used to refer to a singular grave monument, Pausanias’ description, the physical remains of many different casualty lists, and the material evidence [...] clearly indicate that the terms should be understood more broadly to signify ‘burial area’”.

⁴ For a recent *status quaestionis* see Proietti 2023.

⁵ Arrington 2010; 2015.

⁶ Arrington 2015; Wienand 2023.

⁷ Low 2012.

⁸ Stroszeck 2014; Arrington 2015; Wienand 2023.

⁹ Faraguna 2012.

¹⁰ Low 2012; Marchiandi - De Vido 2023.

¹¹ Proietti 2023.

¹² It has also been stressed that the ancient Greeks ultimately lacked the concept itself of cemetery: Patterson 2006a; Walter-Karydi 2015; Faraguna 2021.

als “Friedhof” im modernen Sinne, sondern als einen Bereich der Polis versteht, in dem öffentlichen Gräber konzentrierten, und der insgesamt –und dafür sprechen gerade auch die platzartige Verbreiterung der Straße und die dort stattfindenden öffentlichen Ereignisse– als öffentlicher Raum mit bestimmten Funktionen anzusehen ist.¹³

Despite this important, not to say substantial, qualitative re-assessment of the issue, the name *Demosion Sema* or *Mnema* for this “space for the fallen” seems to resist firmly in the scholarly panorama. Years ago, scholars such as Benedetto Bravo and Cynthia Patterson carefully engaged with the available evidence and disputed the toponimization of the expression *demosion sema*;¹⁴ however, their lines of arguments have not received enough consideration so far. My goal here is to endorse their major points and corroborate them with further arguments.

3. *Sema* and *mnema* in the literary sources

The first and most obvious objection to the toponimization of Thucydides’ *demosion sema* is that this expression as allegedly referring to the whole cemeterial area, instead of the (literally) “public tomb” of those who fell in the first year of the Peloponnesian war, is a *hapax*. It must in fact be admitted that, as far as can be inferred from an *argumentum ex silentio*, if *Demosion Sema* was the official denomination of the state cemetery of the war dead, it seems at least suspect that no other sources, from Classical literature to late *lexica*, record it as such. It seems therefore at least advisable to test, for the expression *demosion sema*, the de-toponimized meaning of a single, literal “public tomb”.

In order to do so, it will be necessary to have a look at the literary occurrences of the words *σῆμα*, *μνήμα*, and *τάφος* both in the singular and plural form. Pace Clairmont, according to whom “the terms *μνήμα*, *σῆμα*, *πολυάνδρειον*, even *τάφος*, seem to always appear in the singular to designate the area as such, irrespective of the number of tombs”,¹⁵ none of these words appear in the ancient sources as denoting a burial area comparable to a cemetery in the modern sense: both in the singular and the plural form, in Classical literature –from Herodotus and Thucydides to Plato and the 4th century orators– these words always refer to single funerary monuments, be they individual or collective.¹⁶

It is true, on the one hand, that some occurrences of the words apparently allow also for their reading as wider burial areas as a whole (e.g. Plat. *Menex.* 242c, quoted above); however, as Bravo has argued, this expansion in meaning can easily be understood not on topographical grounds, but in light of a rhetorical, at the same time almost sacral, transfiguration.¹⁷ On the other hand, though, it is equally and even most importantly true that other occurrences of the words *sema/semata* and *mnema/mnemata* seriously hinder their reading as wider cemeterial areas. In Demosthenes’ *Against Eubulides* the speaker Euxitheus maintains that his mother’s brother died

¹³ Kostopoulos 2019, 289.

¹⁴ Bravo 2006; Patterson 2006a. See also Low 2012.

¹⁵ Clairmont 1983, 29; Arrington 2015, 66–67. *Contra* Bravo 2006; Patterson 2006a, 54–56; 2006b, 27–31.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion see Bravo 2006. On *σῆμα* as indicating a single tomb see e.g. Hdt. 4.72.3; Thuc. 1.93.2; 6.59.3; Demosth. 43.62; Plut. *Per.* 28.5. On *μνήμα* as indicating a single tomb, see e.g. Demosth. 18.208; 43.63–64; 57.28 e 37; Isaeus 5.51; 9.36. *Τάφος* in its singular form refers to the tomb of the fallen (e.g. Lys. 2.60 and 63; Demosth. 55.1 and 13; Hyp. 6.1), or, in the plural, to the funerals (Thuc. 2.35.1; 47.1; Demosth. 55.13 and 30). The passage by Lys. 2.60 is echoed by Aristotle (*Rhet.* 3.1411 A 31), who, despite talking about Salamis, which of course has got nothing to do with Lysias’ funeral oration, clearly hints at the costume of stripping one’s hair upon the single *taphos* of those who fell for freedom.

¹⁷ Bravo 2006, 116–18, esp. 117: “l’oratore parla della tomba in cui vengono ‘ora’ sepolti i caduti per i quali il discorso viene pronunciato [...], come se fosse la stessa tomba in cui furono sepolti i caduti delle battaglie del passato; [...] è chiaro che l’oratore compie qui non un banale travisamento della realtà, bensì una trasfigurazione mentale. [...] Questa trasfigurazione fa sì che una tomba particolare, appartenente alla realtà empirica, venga concepito, al livello della rappresentazione mitico-sacrale che la comunità civica vuole avere di sé stessa nei momenti solenni, come la tomba in cui la polis ateniese [...] seppellisce da sempre i suoi caduti.”

in the Sicilian campaign and lies buried in the δημοσίοις μνήμασι, in the “public tombs”.¹⁸ That the *demosia mnemata* are meant to be the components of an alleged, homonymous, capitalized *Demosion Sema* appears at least a disputable reading. In the Epitaph by Lysias, the tombs of the Spartans who fell against Trasibulos in 403 BC (partly still visible in the area today) are said to be close “to this *mnema*”.¹⁹ Here too, if *Mnema* were the whole cemeterial area, the tombs of the Spartans should be said to be located within it, not beside it. Consequently, it appears difficult to refer *mnema* to something other than the tomb of the fallen to which the Epitaph itself is addressed.²⁰ Also in a preceding paragraph of Lysias’ Epitaph, *mnema* appears to be not the cemetery as a whole, but the burial plot for those fallen in war who were the recipients of the funeral oration which was delivered close to it.²¹

Commenting on these passages, Patterson has already noted that “like σῆμα, μνήμα is in first instance a tomb, and the expansion of the term, in singular or plural, to include a burial plot (e.g. in [Demos] 43.79) retains the emphasis on the monuments themselves and argues against the idea of a cemetery in the modern sense”.²² In the same vein, Bravo too has stated that “l’idea che i termini σῆμα, μνήμα e τάφος, che normalmente erano usati, al singolare, per designare una tomba singola, abbiano potuto essere usati, di nuovo al singolare, anche per designare il cimitero civico, mi pare sospetta”.²³

4. Re-reading the sources: de-toponimizing Thucydides’ *Demosion Sema*?

In addition to the lexical considerations exposed so far, a close reading of Thucydides’ and Pausanias’ passages shows that the toponimization of *demosion sema* and *mnema* is far from being necessary; on the contrary, in both cases the narrative sequence involved apparently favours a different line of reading.

As far as Thucydides is concerned, it so happens that, despite the almost unanimously assumed toponimization of the expression *demosion sema* in the historical and topographical study of ancient Athens, a selective look into the extant translations of the passage appears surprisingly uncertain and diversified. Remarkably, only one scholar translates *sema* with “cemetery”;²⁴ a few use the word “sepulcro”/“sepulchre”, which is undoubtedly vague, while most scholars simply translate *sema* with “monument”/“monumento” or “tomb”/“tomba”/“Grab”, however accompanying it with the determinate article and thus leaving the ambiguity open (see below, Appendix 1):²⁵ the tomb can be either the tomb of the fallen of the year Thucydides’ refers to, or a tomb allegedly common to all. If the latter, however, what do they mean? A charnel house, accommodating the bones of the fallen all together, as happens in modern sacraria such as those in Asiago or Redipuglia? None has apparently considered this option when imagining the *Demosion Sema*.²⁶

¹⁸ Dem. 57.37: καὶ ὁ μὲν Ἀμυθῶν ὁ τῆς μητρὸς ἀδελφὸς τῶν ἐν Σικελίᾳ στρατευσαμένων καὶ τελευτησάντων ἐστίν, καὶ τέθαπται ἐν τοῖς δημοσίοις μνήμασιν. Cf. also Demosth. 18.208, where he swears upon the Athenians forefathers who fell against the Persians and πολλοὺς ἐτέρουσ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς δημοσίοις μνήμασιν κειμένους ἀγαθοὺς ἄνδρας, οὓς ἅπαντας ὁμοίως ἢ πόλις τῆς αὐτῆς ἀξιώσασα τιμῆς ἔθαπεν.

¹⁹ Lys. 2.63: ἀλλ’ ὅμως οὐ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἐναντίων φοβηθέντες, ἀλλ’ ἐν τοῖς σώμασι τοῖς ἑαυτῶν κινδυνεύσαντες, τρόπαιον μὲν τῶν πολεμιῶν ἔστησαν, μάρτυρας δὲ τῆς αὐτῶν ἀρετῆς ἐγγύς ὄντας τοῦδε τοῦ μνήματος τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίων τάφους παρέχονται. For a partially different reading see Arrington 2010, 514.

²⁰ Patterson 2006b, 31-32.

²¹ Lys. 2.60: ὡστ’ ἄξιον ἦν ἐπὶ τῷδε τῷ τάφῳ τότε κείρασθαι τῇ Ἑλλάδι καὶ πενθῆσαι τοὺς ἐνθάδε κειμένους, ὡς συγκαταθαπτομένης τῆς αὐτῶν ἐλευθερίας τῇ τούτων ἀρετῇ. Cfr. Bravo 2006, 116.

²² Patterson 2006a, 55.

²³ Bravo 2006, 111.

²⁴ Fantasia 2003. The reading of *sema* as “sepulcretum” was introduced in the 19th century. See e.g. Poppo-Stahl 1889, 67, according to whom “σῆμα, monumentum [...], hic est sepulturae locus, sepulcretum, ut Horatius sepulcrum pro sepulchro dixit Sat. I 8, 10”.

²⁵ Smith 1919; de Romilly 1973; Moggi 1984; Canfora 1986; Rhodes 1988; Hornblower 1991; Landmann 1991.

²⁶ See Longo 2000, 55: “Il *demosion sema* del Ceramicco non va dunque immaginato come un unico grande sepulcro, quasi un ossario che raccogliesse insieme tutti i caduti” (he then goes on: “ma come un ‘cimitero

If so, why do they translate *sema* with tomb, if they mean a cemetery? Among those translating *sema* with “monument” or “tomb”, in fact, only one takes an explicit position on the issue, and it is not in favour of a cemetery: on the contrary, by using the indeterminate article (“They place the coffins in a public tomb”), Mynott clearly points to the specific tomb of the fallen in that year.²⁷ Notably, Thomas Hobbes provides an authoritative precedent in his first English translation of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1629):

Then they put them into a public monument which standeth in the fairest suburbs of the city, in which place they have ever interred all that died in the wars except those that were slain in the field of Marathon, who, because their virtue was thought extraordinary, were therefore buried thereright.²⁸

Thucydides’ narrative sequence itself seems in fact to suggest that *demosion sema* refers, more plainly, to the public tomb of those who fell in the first year of the Peloponnesian war. These fallen are the protagonists of Thucydides’ description starting from the beginning of § 34, where, not coincidentally, they are said to receive their burials (or more widely funerary honours, depending on how we translate *taphas*) δημοσίᾳ, i.e. at public expense: ἐν δὲ τῷ αὐτῷ χειμῶνι Ἀθηναῖοι τῷ πατρίῳ νόμῳ χρώμενοι δημοσίᾳ ταφὰς ἐποίησαντο τῶν ἐν τῷδε τῷ πολέμῳ πρώτων ἀποθανόντων τρόπῳ τοῖωδε. These fallen are also, accordingly, the recipients of the *logos epitaphios* by Pericles which follows at § 35. When introducing Pericles’ funeral oration (2.34.8), Thucydides maintains that he, having stepped forward from the grave and heading the tribune (προελθὼν ἀπὸ τοῦ σήματος ἐπὶ βῆμα), proclaimed his speech (ἔλεγε τοιάδε). As it has already been observed by Bravo,

non fosse stato per la frase τιθέασιν οὖν ἐς τὸ δημόσιον σῆμα, del passo di cui stiamo trattando, nessuno certamente avrebbe avuto l’idea che il σῆμα del passo ora trascritto potesse essere altra cosa che la tomba in cui furono sepolte le ossa dei caduti del primo anno della guerra narrata da Tucidide.²⁹

Plutarch’s Pericles, too, pronounces his funeral oration for the fallen at Samos not in the alleged *Demosion Sema*, but simply “in the area of the tombs” (ἐπὶ τῶν σημάτων).³⁰ As we are later reminded of by the rhetor Menander of Laodicea, *epitaphios logos* actually “is the name given in Athens to the speech delivered each year over those who have fallen in war. It is so named simply because it is spoken over the actual grave (ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τῷ σήματι)”.³¹ The two paragraphs, 34 and 35, focusing, respectively, on the *nomos* as such, and its *hic et nunc* manifestation in 431, are clearly interconnected: their interconnection revolves around the *sema*, which is at the same time the place where Pericles addresses his funeral oration for the fallen of that year, and the material expression of the canonized *nomos* Thucydides is describing. At this point, Patterson’s reading appears quite compelling:

Sema ought to refer to a tomb or tomb monument. This is its usual meaning and also Thucydides’ usage elsewhere in the *History* [...]. By adding the adjective *demosion*, Thucydides is simply adding the information that this tomb is “at public expense”.³²

degli eroi, un’area riservata alla pubblica sepoltura dei caduti, in monumenti funebri eretti di volta in volta a seconda delle necessità”).

²⁷ Mynott 2013.

²⁸ Overtly based in turn on Stephanus’ and Portus’ translation (1588 and 1594, respectively): “condunt in publico monumento”.

²⁹ Bravo 2006, 113.

³⁰ Plu. *Per.* 28.3: ὁ δὲ Περικλῆς καταστρεψάμενος τὴν Σάμον ὡς ἐπανήλθεν εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας, ταφὰς τε τῶν ἀποθανόντων κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἐνόδους ἐποίησε καὶ τὸν λόγον εἰπὼν, ὥσπερ ἕθος ἐστίν, **ἐπὶ τῶν σημάτων** ἔθασμαστῶθη.

³¹ Men. *Rh.* 2.10 ΠΕΡΙ ΕΠΙΤΑΦΙΟΥ (Race 2019): Λέγεται μὲν παρ’ Ἀθηναίοις ἐπιτάφιος ὁ καθ’ ἕκαστον ἐνιαυτὸν ἐπὶ τοῖς πεπτωκόσιν ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις λεγόμενος λόγος, εἴληφε δὲ τὴν προσσηγορίαν οὐδαμῶθεν ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ λέγεσθαι ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τῷ σήματι.

³² Patterson 2006b, 30, who also adds that “perhaps [Thucydides] intended to evoke the grandeur of the Homeric or epigraphic *sema*, modified by the democratic *demosion*” (*ibid.*). See also Patterson 2006a, 55:

I would be prone to agree then that with the expression *demosion sema* Thucydides is simply, literally referring to the tomb of those who fell in that precise year of the war; by adding the adjective δημοσίος he is just underlining, consistently with the overall tone and meaning of this whole section of his work, that the tomb of the fallen was paid at public expenses, i.e. provided by the *polis*. The public character of the treatment of the war dead was actually the core of the *patrios nomos* that Thucydides is describing.³³ In this regard, the closest parallel to Thucydides' *demosion sema* is provided by the Athenian epitaph for those fallen at the Euripus in 507/6 BC, who are (as far as we know) the first ones to receive a *demosion sema* in Athenian history (though presumably on the battlefield).³⁴ In these lines their tomb is defined as a σῆμα, in which they were buried δημοσίαι, at public expenses: that was the novelty of the time that the epigrammatist cared to underline.³⁵

Thucydides does not only offer the same piece of information but frames it into the now canonized *nomos* he is describing: the public tomb was an essential, standard feature of the *nomos* concerning the war dead. This is why in my view he uses the definite article (ἐς τὸ δημοσίον σῆμα): the public tomb here was what the war dead were regularly expected to receive, on each occasion it happened. After all, a similar use of the definite article to denote a category or a typology, and not a single physical entity, is attested both in the *logoi epitaphioi* themselves, who are dedicated to τοὺς ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ τετελευτηκότας,³⁶ and in the inscriptions running around the rim of the prize vases for the winner in the *agones epitaphioi*, namely Ἀθηναῖοι ἄθλα ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ.³⁷ The fallen to which Thucydides refers to are not expected to receive a generic public tomb, but exactly that kind of public tomb which was required by the *nomos*. This reading might also impact on the interpretive problem posed by the adverb αἰεὶ used by Thucydides at 2.34.5: when he states that the Athenians “αἰεὶ ἐν αὐτῷ θάπτουσι τοὺς ἐκ τῶν πολέμων” he broadly means that they *always* bury war dead there. “Always”, however, does not necessarily point to a diachronic perspective, implying the sense of “from immemorable time” or, more concretely, “from the introduction of the *nomos*”:³⁸ it might well mean, instead, as already Ostwald long ago pointed out, “on each occasion’ when public burials of the war-dead took place”.³⁹ This reading has the

“it is best to keep *demosion sema* just what it is –Thucydides’ own idiosyncratic term, perhaps meant to evoke a heroic or poetic model, for the public (paid for with public funds) tomb of the war dead”.

³³ Thucydides’ *patrios nomos* is usually identified with the act of repatriating the war dead, not with the act of burying them at public expense: see at least Jacoby 1944; Ostwald 1969; Toher 1999, and more recently Ferré 2008 for a *status quaestionis*.

³⁴ Δίρφος ἐδμήθημεν ὑπὸ πτυχί, σῆμα δ’ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν / ἐγγύθειν Εὐρίπου δημοσίαι κέχυται / οὐκ ἀδίκως ἐρατὴν γὰρ ἀπώλεσάμεν νεότιγα / τρηχίαν πολέμου δεξάμενοι νεφέλην (Sim. II *FGE*). The epigram is not preserved on stone; it is transmitted by the *Palatine Anthology* only (XVI 26). Most commentators do not cast any doubt on its authenticity as epitaph for the fallen at the Euripus, starting from Jacoby 1945, 160: “I have personally not the least doubt that it is a genuine epitaph from the stele on the grave”. Some of them (e.g. Page 1981, 189-91) doubt the authenticity of the second distich only, as it seems a superfluous and redundant addition to the first one. For comments on the epigram see also Clairmont 1983, 88-89; Pritchett 1985, 164-65; Rausch 1999, 226-27; Anderson 2003, 151-55.

³⁵ Independent from the issue of the epigram’s authenticity, it appears clear that the great novelty at the time was the public character of the burial. Clairmont himself (1983, 88) noted that the expression δημοσίαι (v. 2), pretty uncommon in the public epitaphs for the war dead, was meant to underline the novelty in the burial of the fallen, i.e. its being provided by the *polis*. In this sense see already Jacoby 1945, 159-60, n. 15: “the battle was the first military feat of the new democratic army and the poetical epitaph was a new device which is stressed purposefully by δημοσίαι”. See also Pritchett 1985, 165: “later, such an information was superfluous”.

³⁶ Lys. 2.80; see also Aristot. *Ath. Pol.* 58.1. Compare also, equally telling, the inscribed headings on several surviving casualty lists (οἶδε ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ ἀπέθανον; see Pritchett 1985, 108).

³⁷ *IG* I³ 523-524-525; see Vanderpool 1969; Proietti 2021, 84-86.

³⁸ As according to a mostly 19th century reading (e.g. Classen-Steup 1863, 57: “αἰεὶ, seitdem der Brauch der öffentlichen Bestattung der Gefallenen besteht”; Poppo-Stahl 1879, 67: “A quo tempore res fieri coepta sit”)

³⁹ Ostwald 1969, 175. See also Clairmont 1983, 12; Pritchett 1985, 124, and recently Ferré 2008, 106: “αἰεὶ non significa ‘da sempre’, con riferimento a un’insondabile *antichità* del *nomos*, ma ‘sempre’ con riferimento alla nota *regolarità* acquisita dal *nomos* dopo la sua istituzione”. Fantasia 2003, 365 understands αἰεὶ as

effect of corroborating Thucydides' focus on the *demosion sema* he is describing as an *hic et nunc* manifestation of the *nomos*, and not as the result of a long custom leading to the accretion of public burials into a definite portion of space.

As the single (albeit collective) burial of the fallen in that year of war, Thucydides' *demosion sema* therefore stands out within a more or less coherent landscape made of several other *demosia semata* and *demosia mnemata*, where the Athenians bury their war dead anytime they have the chance to do so. This kind of landscape is exactly what one can figure out from Pausanias' description of the area.

5. Re-reading the sources: de-toponimizing Pausanias' *Mnema*?

Similar to Thucydides' *demosion sema*, the *mnema* mentioned by Pausanias at 1.29.4 should also be tentatively de-toponimized, i.e. tested with the meaning of a single monument, instead of as a cemetery as a whole. If we consider the wider narrative sequence of Pausanias' text, in fact, *mnema* as a single monument appears as its most natural translation. The Periegetes, starting his route after the Dipylon gate and heading to the Akademia, first mentions the tombs of Thrasibulus, Perikles, Cabrias and Phormio (1.29.3); he then goes on to say that "there is also a tomb for all the Athenians who fell in land and sea battles" (1.29.4: ἔστι δὲ καὶ πᾶσι μνήμα Ἀθηναίοις ὅποσιν ἀποθανεῖν συνέπεσεν ἔν τε ναυμαχίαις καὶ ἐν μάχαις πεζαῖς) and enumerates a long series of *taphoi*, *stelai* and *mnemata* of the war dead, starting from those who fell at the Eurymedon and in Drabescus in the 60s of the 5th century (chapter 29, par. 4 to 14). Were it not for the common association with Thucydides' alleged *Demosion Sema*, none would probably ever read Pausanias' *pasi mnema Athenaios* as a cemetery. To be honest, in this case too extant translations consistently avoid translating *mnema* with "cemetery": from Jones to Musti, all have instead "monument" or "tomb" (see below, Appendix 2).⁴⁰ Some have even attempted a possible identification of Pausanias' *mnema* with a single, specific monument: Petrovic for instance has reasonably proposed to identify it with IG I³ 503/4, the Athenian monument for the Persian wars, dating to the 70s.⁴¹

Regardless of this possible identification, it is Pausanias' narrative sequence itself which suggests that the *mnema pasi Athenaios* at paragraph 4 and the following *mnemata* which are listed from paragraph 6 onwards are not to be read in a hierarchical relation, as if the latter were parts of the former: in other terms, single listed *mnemata* are not parts of a capitalized and toponimized hyper-box named itself as *Mnema*. This is clear when Pausanias introduces the tomb of the *hippeis* fallen at Tanagra by saying that it was ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ μνήματος (1.29.6), "in front of the tomb".⁴² This tomb is obviously the tomb he had just mentioned, that of the fallen at Drabescus. If *mnema* here were the cemetery, the tomb of the cavalymen fallen at Tanagra should be said to

it means 'a partire dall'istituzione dei funerali pubblici', but admits that "αἰεὶ potrebbe avere il valore di ἐκάστοτε: 'tutte le volte' in cui i funerali hanno luogo". For αἰεὶ as 'continually', 'regularly' see already some 19th century commentators, such as Bloomfield 1829, 357; Arnold 1854, 89.

⁴⁰ Metzler 1827; Jones 1918; Musti 1982; Rizzo 1991; Pouilloux 1992. Only Eckstein 1986 (based on E. Meyer's previous commented translation) renders Pausanias' *mnema* with "ein gemeinsames Grabmal für alle Athener", arbitrarily adding the adjective "gemeinsam" to introduce the idea of a collective charnel house.

⁴¹ Petrovic 2007, 166-67. Although I endorse Petrovic's identification between Pausanias' *mnema* and IG I³ 503/4, I do not agree with his interpretation of the monument as referring exclusively to the second Persian war. As I myself and others have widely argued elsewhere, IG I³ 503/4 might best be thought of as the funerary monument of the Athenian fallen of the second Persian war, which was later modified with the addition of epigrams retrospectively commemorating the Marathonomachoi. This reading of the monument as a *polyandron cum cenotaph*, which is based on several epigraphic and historical facts (see Proietti 2021, 144-52 and 287-92, with earlier references), would well explain the other hotly debated passage in Thucydides' text, that defining the burial of the *Marathonomachoi* on the battlefield as an exception (2.34.5).

⁴² 1.29.6: ἔστι δὲ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ μνήματος στήλη μαχομένων ἔχουσα ἵππεῖς: Μελάνωπός σφισὶν ἔστι καὶ Μακάρτατος ὄνόματα, οὓς κατέλαβεν ἀποθανεῖν ἐναντία Λακεδαιμονίων καὶ Βοιωτῶν τεταγμένους, ἔνθα τῆς Ἑλεωνίας εἰσὶ χώρας πρὸς Ταναγραίους ὄροι. καὶ Θεσσαλῶν τάφος ἔστιν ἵππέων κατὰ παλαιὰν φιλίαν ἑλθόντων, ὅτε σὺν Ἀρχιδάμῳ Πελοποννήσιοι πρῶτον ἐσέβαλον ἐς τὴν Ἀπτικὴν στρατιᾷ, καὶ πλησίον τοῦτοιαί

be “within the *mnema*”, not in front of it. This reading appears consistent with what Bravo already observed, namely that “All’inizio del §4 Pausania non segnala l’esistenza di un’area riservata alla sepoltura dei caduti in Guerra, segnala invece che all’interno dell’insieme dei sepolcri del cimitero civico si può distinguere *la categoria* dei sepolcri degli Ateniesi caduti in guerra”.⁴³ Remarkably enough, at 1.29.4 two manuscripts preserve the plural *mnemata* instead of *mnema*, and there are some scholars, such as Bravo himself –relying in turn on Karl Friedrich Hermann– who strongly argue in favour of *mnemata* in the main text,⁴⁴ notably, also James G. Frazer accepted the plural form: “There are also tombs of all the Athenians who fell in battle by sea or land”.⁴⁵ In Pausanias too, therefore, the toponimization of the *mnema* mentioned at 1.29.4 is likely to appear as the outcome of a modern hyper-interpretation.

6. “Where will we be buried? The Kerameikos will receive us”

If the alleged *Demosion Sema* was not called as such, how was the area where the tombs of the war dead were more or less consistently placed defined? A literary source contemporary to Thucydides, Aristophanes’ *Birds* (414BC), suggests that late in the 5th century the area which was known as doomed to receive the burials of the war dead was simply referred to as “Kerameikos”. A dialogue between Euelpides and Pisthetaerus at lines 393-399 allows us to catch a glimpse of Athenian civic imagery and knowledge of civic space and their uses. When Euelpides asks where they would be buried if they died, Pisthetaerus answers “The Kerameikos will receive us: there we will be buried at public expense (δημοσία), if we tell the generals that we died in war fighting the enemies in the Cloud-cuckoo-land”.⁴⁶

[Ευελπίδης]

ἔτεόν ἦν ὄ’ ἄρ’ ἀποθάνωμεν,
κατορυχθησόμεσθα ποῦ γῆς;

[Evelpides]

But tell me, if we do get killed,
where on earth will we be buried?

[Πισθέταιρος]

ὁ Κεραμεικὸς δέξεται νῶ.
δημοσία γὰρ ἵνα ταφῶμεν,
φήσομεν πρὸς τοὺς στρατηγούς
μαχομένῳ τοῖς πολεμίοισιν
ἀποθανεῖν ἐν Ὀρνεαίς.

[Peisthetaerus]

Potter’s Field will take us.
You see, we’ll get a state funeral by telling the
generals that we died fighting the enemy at
Finchburg.
(transl. J. Henderson 2000)

The mention of the Kerameikos as the portion of urban space where the war dead were buried at public expenses also appears in Harpocration, commenting on a passage in Antiphon’s *Against Neikokles*: here the place where the war dead were buried, once again δημοσία, and received their funeral oration, is identified with the “Outer Kerameikos”, or Kerameikos “outside the walls”.⁴⁷ The fact that also in the later lexicographical sources the place where the war dead were given public burial continued to be the Κεραμεικὸς ἐκτὸς (or ἔξω) τῆς πόλεως (or τέικους) (outside the city or outside the city walls),⁴⁸ seems to further suggest that that place never had a more specific name,

Κρησίν: αὐθις δέ ἐστιν Ἀθηναίων μνήματα Κλεισθένους, ὧ τὰ ἐς τὰς φυλάς αἱ νῦν καθεστᾶσιν εὐρέθη, καὶ ἱππεύσιν ἀποθανοῦσιν ἡνίκα συνεπελάβοντο οἱ Θεσσαλοὶ τοῦ κινδύνου.

⁴³ Bravo 2006, 129 (with my italics).

⁴⁴ Bravo 2006, 129.

⁴⁵ Frazer 1898, 44.

⁴⁶ Aristoph. *Av.* 393-99. Cf. Siewert 2000; Patterson 2006a, 55; 2006b, 30.

⁴⁷ Harpokr. s.v. Κεραμεικός, commenting on Antiph. fr. 41 Sauppe and citing Callikrates/Menecles (*FGrH* 370 F4b) for the information given: Ἀντιφῶν ἐν τῷ πρὸς Νικοκλέα περὶ ὄρων. ὅτι δύο εἰσι Κεραμεικοί, ὡς καὶ ὁ ῥήτωρ φησίν, ὁ μὲν ἔνδον τῆς πόλεως, ὁ δὲ ἕτερος ἔξω, ἔνθα καὶ τοὺς ἐν πολέμῳ τελευτήσαντας ἔθαπτον δημοσία καὶ τοὺς ἐπιταφίους ἔλεγον, δηλοῖ Καλλικράτης ἢ Μενεκλῆς ἐν τῷ περὶ Ἀθηνῶν.

⁴⁸ E.g. Phot. and *Suid.* s.v. Κεραμεικός. For a complete collection of sources see Ruggeri 2005; 2013; Ruggeri – Siewert – Steffelbauer 2007. Roman sources (e.g. Cic. *Fin.* 5, 1; Livy. 31, 24, 9-16) speak of the tombs which were located along the way (“*via lata*” according to Livy) from the Dipylon to the Academia, thus giving only these two as topographical references.

be it *Demosion Sema*, or another. Should we ask a late 5th century Athenian where the war dead were buried, they would most likely answer, simply, “in the Kerameikos”.

Admittedly, this is exactly what Thucydides himself might mean. If we go back and consider the whole passage 2.34.5 from which our analysis has departed –τιθέασιν οὖν ἐς τὸ δημόσιον σῆμα, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τοῦ καλλίστου προαστείου τῆς πόλεως, καὶ αἶει ἐν αὐτῷ θάπτουσι τοὺς ἐκ τῶν πολέμων–, we should take into account the possibility that ἐν αὐτῷ does not refer to the δημόσιον σῆμα, as it is implied in most common readings, but to the “beautiful suburb of the Kerameikos” which is mentioned in the immediately preceding parenthetical clause. Remarkably, among the extant comments and translations (see again below, Appendix 1), only a minority of scholars syntactically connect ἐν αὐτῷ with δημόσιον σῆμα. This connection appears in fact to be introduced in the 19th century, by scholars such as Classen–Steup and Poppe–Stahl, who read ἐν αὐτῷ as ἐν ᾧ,⁴⁹ and is a direct consequence of the extensive, metonymic reading of δημόσιον σῆμα as “sepulchretum”.⁵⁰ Earlier editors as well as most scholars nowadays render instead ἐν αὐτῷ with a generic locative adverb such as ‘là/qui’, ‘dort’, ‘there’, thus leaving space for any interpretation. Notably, Hobbes himself did not only translate δημόσιον σῆμα with “a public monument”, pointing therefore to the single tomb which was set up to those specific fallen, as we have already seen, but renders the following sentence with a relative clause which explicitly connects ἐν αὐτῷ with the suburb of the Kerameikos (and so does one of the most recent translations, by Mynott: see Appendix 1 below). If this reading is correct, the toponimization of the expression *demosion sema* would definitely lose any support patch, and Thucydides’ passage would match Aristophanes in stating that war dead were usually buried, simply, in the Kerameikos.

Appendix 1. Selected translations of Thuc. 2.34.5

Stephanus 1588	Condúntque <u>in publico monumento</u> , quod est in pulcherrimis urbis suburbiis. (<i>ubi semper eos sepehant qui in bello ceciderunt</i>).
Portus 1594; Duker - Wasse 1788-1789; Gail 1807	Haec autem <u>in publico monumēto</u> condunt, quod est in pulcherrimis urbis suburbiis. (<i>atque hic semper sepehant eos, qui in bello ceciderūt</i>).
Hobbes 1629	Then they put them <u>into a public monument</u> which standeth in the fairest suburbs of the city, <i>in which place they have ever interred</i> all that died in the wars.
Smith (W.) 1753	They deposit the remains <u>in the public sepulchre</u> , which stands in the finest suburb of the city; - <i>for it hath been the constant custom here to bury</i> all who fell in war.
Heilmann - Bredow 1812	Endlich werden sie <u>in die öffentliche Grabstätte</u> , welche in der schönsten Gegend von der Stadt ist, begeben. <i>Es ist dieses die gemeine Grabstätte für alle die, welche solcher Gestalt im Kriege bleiben</i> .
Bloomfield 1829	They then deposit them <u>in the public sepulchre</u> (which is at the handsomest suburb of the city) <i>wherein they continually inter</i> those who fall in war.
Smith (C.F.) 1919	The coffins are laid <u>in the public sepulchre</u> , which is situated in the most Beautiful suburb of the city; <i>there they always bury</i> those fallen in war.
Crawley 1950	The dead are laid <u>in the public sepulchre</u> in the most beautiful suburb of the city, <u>in which</u> those who fall in war <i>are always buried</i> .
de Romilly 1973	On confie alors les restes <u>au monument public</u> , qui est situé dans le plus beau faubourg de la ville <i>et où l'on ensevelit toujours</i> les victimes de la guerre.
Donini 1982	Pongono le bare nel cimitero pubblico, che è nel più bel sobborgo della città; e <i>in esso seppelliscono sempre</i> quelli che sono caduti nelle guerre.
Moggi 1984	A questo punto depongono le bare <u>nel monumento pubblico</u> , che è situato nel più bel sobborgo della città e <i>in cui si seppelliscono da sempre</i> i caduti in guerra.

⁴⁹ Classen–Steup 1863, 57: “καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ist die bequemere Anknüpfung des zweiten Gliedes des Relativsatzes, statt καὶ ἐν ᾧ”.

⁵⁰ Cfr. *supra*, n. 24.

Canfora 1986	Alle spoglie viene data sepoltura <u>nel sepolcro pubblico</u> , che si trova nella località più bella del circondario di Atene; i caduti in guerra <i>sono stati sempre sepolti lì</i> .
Rhodes 1988	The dead are placed <u>in the public tomb</u> , which is situated in the most beautiful suburb of the city. Those who die in war <i>are always buried there</i> .
Torres Esbarranch 1990	Los depositan luego <u>en el sepulcro público</u> , que esta situado en el más bello arrabal de la ciudad, <i>y en el que siempre han enterrado a los que han muerto en la guerra, excepción hecha de los de Maratón</i> .
Hornblower 1991 ad loc., 294	They bury them <u>in the state tomb</u> [<i>demosion sema</i>], which is situated in the most beautiful suburb of the city.
Landmann 1991	Dann setzen sie sie <u>in dem öffentlichen Grab</u> bei, das in der schönsten Vorstadt liegt – <i>die im Krieg Gefallenen begraben sie immer dort</i> .
Fantasia 2003	Depongono quindi le bare <u>nel cimitero pubblico</u> , che sorge nel più bel sobborgo della città; <i>qui seppelliscono sempre i caduti di guerra</i> .
Mynott 2013	They place the coffins <u>in a public tomb</u> , which is in the most beautiful suburb of the city <i>where they always bury their war dead</i> .

Appendix 2. Selected translations of Paus. 1.29.4

Metzler 1827	Es ist auch da <u>ein Grabmal</u> für alle Athener, welche das Schicksal traf, in Schlachten zur See und zu Lande zu fallen.
Schubart 1857	Es haben auch ein Grabmal alle Athener, so viele ihrer in See- und Landschlachten geblieben find.
Frazer 1898	There are also <u>tombs</u> of all the Athenians who fell in battle by sea or land.
Jones 1918	There is also <u>a monument</u> for all the Athenians whose fate it has been to fall in battle, whether at sea or on land.
Musti 1982	C'è anche <u>un monumento</u> per tutti gli Ateniesi morti in battaglie navali e terrestri.
Eckstein 1986	Es gibt auch <u>ein gemeinsames Grabmal für alle Athener</u> , die in Seeschlachten und Landkämpfen gefallen sind.
Rizzo 1991	C'è anche <u>un monumento funebre</u> dedicato a tutti gli Ateniesi che per mare e per terra incontrarono la morte in battaglia.
Pouilloux 1992	Il y a aussi <u>le tombeau</u> de tous les Athéniens qui ont trouvé la mort dans des combats sur terre ou sur mer.
Herrero Ingelmo 1994	También tienen <u>un monumento</u> todos los atenienses que murieron en batallas navales y terrestres, excepto los que lucharon en Maratón.

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