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Classical Allusions at Memorial Post-Mortem Photography of the 19th and Early 20th Century: The Ancient Greek Motif of 'Hypnos and Thanatos'

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Abstract

Photography establishes, by definition, a dynamic relationship between the present and the past as it captures ephemeral moments of the present, instantaneously relegating them to the past. This article explores the reception and enduring influence of the "eternal sleep" motif in memorial post-mortem photography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rooted in ancient Greek mythology and specifically associated with the twin deities Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death), this iconographic motif conveys the notion that the deceased is not dead but merely asleep. Through this imagery, death is not depicted as an absolute cessation but rather as a liminal state of repose, suggestive of continuity or transition. The visual expression of this motif became especially prominent in post-mortem photographic representations of the period, when many individuals had never been photographed in life, making the mourning portrait their sole visual record. The motif of sleep, as a simulacrum of death, provided mourners with the consolatory illusion that their loved one was merely resting, thereby mitigating the stark finality of death while symbolically asserting life through the still image. Adopting reception theory and the Annales School's emphasis on the longue durée and collective mentalities, this article argues that the persistence of the "last sleep" motif in 19th-century post-mortem photography reflects long-standing symbolic patterns from ancient Greek art and literature, demonstrating how cultural memory has shaped modern representations of death as a serene and eternal sleep, and consequently as something readily comprehensible to human consciousness.

Keywords

Post-mortem photography; last sleep; Hypnos; Thanatos; Classical Reception

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Introduction

In the contemporary era of cultural and technological transformation, photography serves as a means of perpetuating the human image and preserving individual memory. From the earliest years of the medium, beginning in the 1840s, individuals sought to capture images of their deceased loved ones to safeguard their memory. This distinctive genre, later termed memorial post-mortem photography, entails the photographic representation of an individual after death, typically within the domestic sphere or, in some cases, outdoors, with or without family members present. Such sessions generally took place at the deceased's home or during the funeral ceremony, shortly before interment. Frequently, the deceased was arranged in a pose intended to suggest not death, but a state of peaceful slumber. This convention marked a revival of the Last Sleep motif—a theme with origins in Classical antiquity and a prominent presence in the funerary art and literature of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds.

The impetus for this study originated in the encounter with a marble funerary deathbed (*klinē*) dated to the fourth century BCE, discovered nearly a century ago at Cheliotomilos, Corinth, and currently housed in the Archaeological Museum of Corinth, Greece. I first came across this exceptional artefact during a visit to the museum in 2021, an experience that prompted a sustained inquiry into related iconographic and cultural references. The presence of a sculpted deathbed within an ancient tomb appeared to signify, in both a realistic and idealised manner, the enduring human aspiration for eternal life.

This study adopts a multidisciplinary methodological approach that combines visual analysis, iconographic comparison, and cultural interpretation. Although historians of photography have catalogued the 'last sleep' trope, the most systematic discussion of the subject is provided by the American anthropologist Jay Ruby.[1] Nevertheless, the connections between this photographic motif and the classical past have yet to be examined comprehensively.[2] Likewise, art historians and classical reception scholars focus primarily on painting and sculpture rather than vernacular photographic practices. Then, central to my research is the comparative examination of nineteenth and early twentieth-century memorial post-mortem photographs with ancient Greek funerary representations of the twin deities Hypnos and Thanatos. Through formal and symbolic analysis of photographic imagery, the research traces visual continuities and reinterpretations of the "eternal sleep" motif.

This analysis draws on the field of Classical Reception to investigate how aspects of Classical antiquity, in this case art and iconography, could have been received, reinterpreted, and recontextualised in modern and contemporary cultural production. Within this framework, photography is understood not merely as a documentary medium but as a dynamic site where visual and symbolic traditions – ancient or modern – are adapted and transformed with new layers of meaning, thereby sustaining an ongoing dialogue between the Classical past and modern visual culture. This reception should be understood not solely within the framework of artistic traditions directly influenced by Greek antiquity, but rather as part of a broader, cross-cultural motif, the reclining posture of the deceased. This pose, while deeply rooted in the iconography of the Classical world, resonates as a universal visual convention that reflects enduring human conceptions of death, repose, and the liminal state between life and the afterlife. However, as I am not a Classicist by training and my expertise lies in the history of photography, this paper may take an unfamiliar approach to Classical material. In a way, this should

[1] Ruby, 1995.
[2] For a record of the macabre in photography, see Mord, 2014. On the discussion of Hypnos and Thanatos in Ancient Greek literature, art, and iconography, see Tsingarida, 2009; Dunn, 2023; Gartziou-Tatti, 2023.

serve as a disclaimer: this paper is, I hope, a fresh take on the connections of the Classical past and iconography to contemporary practices. By and large, it is not, and does not seek to be, a study of Classical religion, myth or art, areas applicable to the discussion, but in which the author has limited experience.

The discussion unfolds in four chapters. First, I situate the emergence of post-mortem photography within nineteenth-century funerary culture. Second, I discuss the reclining pose in Victorian mourning portraits with the fifth-century red-figure iconography of Hypnos and Thanatos, demonstrating some continuity in the presentation of sleep-like death. Then, I mobilise reception theory and the Annales concept of the *longue durée* to argue that the serene, sleep-like representation of death constitutes a deep-time symbolic structure and not a specific, direct imitation.[3] Finally, I consider the ethical and affective implications of the classical past and modern commemorative practices, as well as the use of photography as a vehicle for some form of classical memory. A brief conclusion presents the main argument again and highlights the relevance of deep-time visual structure for understanding contemporary representations of death.

The Origins of Post-Mortem Photography

From an etymological perspective, the term 'post-mortem' is the most accurate and appropriate designation for this specific photographic practice, as it precisely conveys the temporal and ontological condition of the subject depicted, namely, the deceased. Notably, the term bears no association with post-mortem experiences or concepts of the afterlife as understood within Christian theology. The prefix 'post' clearly indicates that the photograph was taken after the person's death, thus distinguishing it from other forms of portraiture. In Greek-language sources, one may also encounter alternative designations such as 'deathbed portrait', 'mourning portrait', or 'last portrait'.[4] In English-language literature, however, the term post-mortem predominates, while posthumous appears only rarely and typically in broader contexts unrelated to photography.

Mourning portraiture emerged alongside the invention of photography in 1839 and experienced significant proliferation in the subsequent decades. From its inception in the nineteenth century, photography has captured various aspects of life, with a particular emphasis on portraiture and landscapes. As death constitutes an inherent aspect of human experience, it became part of this emerging visual documentation of reality. Indeed, some of the earliest photographic endeavours appear to have involved depicting the deceased. In October 1839, only months after the official announcement of photography, Dr Alfred Donné submitted several photographic specimens to the French Academy of Sciences while still experimenting with the new medium. Among them, notably, were photographs depicting deceased people. In his letter, he wrote: "I have the honour of sending you some new images made by the method of daguerreotype, which I have submitted, as first trials, to the Academy. I have

[3] In historiography, the concept of the *longue durée* was developed by Fernand Braudel and the Annales School. It emphasises long-term social structures, economic transformations, and geographical factors that unfold over centuries, or even millennia, see Braudel, 1958: 725–753. In art history, the *longue durée* can be interpreted as an approach that emphasises the study of art and visual culture over extended periods, focusing on long-term structures and processes rather than short-term events or individual artworks. On reception as a 'horizon of expectations', Jauss, 1982; for reflections on aspects of reception, especially on (religious) art, see Elsner, 2003.

[4] The title *Last Portrait* was employed both for the exhibition *Le dernier Portrait*, held in Paris in 2002 (Héran *et al*., 2002), and for the homonymous publication of the Greek Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA-MIET) accompanying it, published in 2019.

Figure 1. *Post-Mortem Portrait of a Child*, by Bartolomeo Borri; c.1890. Source: Private Collection of Spyridon P. Gaoutsis, Corfu.

already achieved an important accomplishment, taking a picture of a dead".[5] Unfortunately, no trace of this picture has been found.

The post-mortem photographs examined in this article depict the deceased photographed in familiar settings, usually at their home, shortly after their death, or in outdoor locations during the transfer of the body for the funeral. The research focuses on how these deceased were photographed, often presenting them as if they were merely asleep. The purpose of such photographs was to preserve the image of the deceased as someone who, although having died, is not permanently lost, but simply resting. Consequently, it also aimed to preserve the deceased's memory correspondingly. A very characteristic post-mortem photograph is the portrait of a child, captured in their bed, wearing white clothes and crossing their hands on their body. His eyes are half open, which makes the picture even more paradoxical and emotional (Figure 1).

In the mid-nineteenth century, most people did not have photographic portraits of themselves. During the early years of photography, the medium remained relatively inaccessible due to its high cost, time-consuming process, and limited availability, factors that made it primarily exclusive to the upper classes. As a result, many individuals were photographed for the first and only time after their death. A post-mortem photograph thus served not only as the sole visual representation of the deceased[6] but also as both a commemorative artefact and a familial heirloom.[7] It preserved the physical features of the departed and functioned as a tangible vehicle for memory, transmitting their image and presence to future generations. Moreover, post-mortem photographs represent a new form of image-history analysis while continuing to symbolise belief in an afterlife or an ongoing spiritual journey.[8]

From its earliest emergence, photography sought to establish itself within the domain of the fine arts by adopting the aesthetic conventions, compositional strategies, and thematic concerns traditionally associated with painting. In this context, it is unsurprising that early practitioners of post-mortem photography closely followed the formal arrangements and poses employed by painters, particularly in the representation of the deceased.[9] This visual continuity reflects photography's early aspiration for artistic legitimacy and its reliance on established iconographic models. Painted postmortem portraits had been produced since the Renaissance, serving as precedents for the photographic mourning portrait. A notable example is *Man on His Deathbed* by Barthel Bruyn the Younger (Figure 2),

[5] Héran *et al*., 2002: 112.
[6] Hirsch, 2017: 43.
[7] Regarding the primary function of a souvenir associated with photography, it lies in its capacity to evoke the mental reality of an object or the circumstances connected with it. It functions as a private image, accessible only to the individual concerned, and may take on various forms. Fundamentally, the souvenir serves to preserve the images retained in memory, see Antoniadis, 2014: 11–12.
[8] Mord, 2014: 25.
[9] In 1891, the English photographer George Davison (1854–1930), co-founder of the *Linked Ring Brotherhood* of British artists and managing director of Kodak UK, observed that "Photography has come late in the day. It would be difficult for it to avoid likeness to something that had preceded it". Aesthetic theory considers both the ways in which works of art are perceived and the means by which each artistic attribute is interpreted and translated into visual form. Consequently, photographic art is frequently informed by the aesthetics of other visual arts, drawing upon conventions such as composition, focus, the interplay of light and shadow, material qualities including colour and surface finish, and, finally, the selection of subject matter. These elements can be articulated in terms of other visual arts or adopted directly from their terminology. This approach not only defends photography's emerging status as a legitimate art form but also provides a framework for understanding photographs as images. Like painting or drawing, photography represents the transposition of mechanical and material realities onto a two-dimensional plane, rendering analogies with the graphic arts both relevant and instructive, Kingsley, 2008: 76; see also Rosenblum, 2007: 208–243, for a detailed discussion.

Figure 2. *Man in his Deathbed,* by Barthel Bruyn, the Younger; c.1607–1610. Source: Richard Harris Art Collection, Chicago, IL.

which exemplifies the solemnity, realism, and commemorative intent that would later characterise photographic representations of the dead.

The earliest examples of postmortem photography often portrayed the deceased with open eyes or in an upright pose, seated on a chair or sofa, and were frequently accompanied by family members, in an effort to simulate lifelikeness (Figure 3). These attempts to animate the appearance of the dead, however, often resulted in unsettling or unintentionally grotesque images. Consequently, this practice was soon abandoned in favour of more subdued, symbolically appropriate representations.

By its very nature, post-mortem photography required a high degree of intervention by the photographer, who was responsible for arranging the body in a dignified and aesthetically coherent manner. The most prevalent compositional choice for individual postmortem portraits was the side-angle view, in which the deceased's face was captured in profile. This specific angle served dual functions: first, it allowed the photographer to conceal visible signs of decomposition or facial disfigurement; second, it contributed to the illusion of repose, reinforcing the visual and symbolic association with peaceful sleep rather than physical death (Figure 4).

Figure 3. *Post-Mortem Portrait of a Young Boy*, unknown photographer; daguerreotype, c.1855. Source: The Thanatos Archive, Washington, DC.

From the Ancient Deities Hypnos and Thanatos to the Photographic Motif of the 'Last Sleep'

Although the striking realism of photography eventually led to the preference for showing the deceased in a lying-down position, early photographers still tried to present them as if they were alive or at rest. In their efforts to evoke a sense of peace, they often placed religious symbols, such as a crucifix or religious icons, into the hands of the deceased, referencing Christian beliefs in the Resurrection and the promise of eternal life (Figure 5). Humans exhibit a persistent tendency to attribute to the dead the qualities of the living, thereby granting them the imagined capacity to continue existence beyond earthly life in an afterworld. In this framework, sleep replaces death, and the preservation of the body is favoured over its natural decomposition. The belief in a transition to another realm finds deep historical roots in ancient Greek thought.

As early as Homer's *Nekyia*, in the episode of Odysseus' descent into Hades, the boundaries between the two worlds are made unclear, revealing the vulnerability of the physical body in contrast to the immortality of the soul. Following Circe's counsel, Odysseus journeys to the valley of the dead,

Figure 4. *Post-Mortem Portrait of a Young Boy*, by Yiorgos Moraitis; c.1870. Source: Private Collection of Alkis Xanthakis, Athens.

a liminal, dreamlike domain in which he recognises the voices and shadows of his long-lost loved ones and converses with them. Yet, the encounter underscores an irrevocable truth: the souls of the departed remain intangible phantoms, forever beyond the reach of physical touch.[10]

The portrayal of the soul's intangible existence beyond death in *Nekyia* resonates with the later mythological association of death and sleep embodied by the twin deities Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death). These two deities were sons of Nyx (Night), and, as anthropomorphic personifications of sleep and death respectively, were believed to gently carry the souls of the departed into the afterlife.[11] I think it is hard, then, to miss the connection. The visual and symbolic merging of sleep and death in photographic representation echoes this mythological framework. According to Homer, Lemnos was the homeland of Hypnos.[12] He was considered an ally of humans, while Thanatos, his brother, was their enemy, for he kept any human he would meet. The interaction between these deities and the overlap of their roles was often helpful in cases of deceased mythical heroes whose bodies had to be transferred from the earthly world to the ethereal world of souls. In the majority of the surviving representations, the two gods are depicted together, accompanying the deceased on their journey to

[10] Hom. *Od*. 11.471–477: ἔγνω δὲ ψυχή με ποδώκεος Αἰακίδαο | καί ῥ᾽ ὀλοφυρομένη ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα: | ‘διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη, πολυμήχαν᾽ Ὀδυσσεῦ, | σχέτλιε, τίπτ᾽ ἔτι μεῖζον ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μήσεαι ἔργον; || πῶς ἔτλης Ἄϊδόσδε κατελθέμεν, ἔνθα τε νεκροὶ | ἀφραδέες ναίουσι, βροτῶν εἴδωλα καμόντων; [trans. A. T. Murray: “And the spirit of the swift-footed son of Aeacus recognized me, and weeping, spoke to me winged words: “Son of Laertes, sprung from Zeus, Odysseus of many devices, rash man, what deed yet greater than this wilt thou devise in thy heart? How didst thou dare to come down to Hades, where dwell the unheeding dead, the phantoms of men outworn’].

[11] Hes. *Theog.* 212. For Cicero (*Nat. D.* 3.17), their father is Erebos (Darkness).

[12] Hom. *Il*. 14.231–242. In Hesiod (*Theog*. 736–761), they live with the other Titanes in Tartaros.

Figure 5. *Post-Mortem Portrait of an Old Man in Bulgaria*, unknown photographer; c.1920, Source: Private Collection of Platon Rivellis, Athens.

Hades.[13] The cultural reception and enduring iconographic legacy of the Hypnos–Thanatos motif manifested in the modern era, reemerging in memorial post-mortem photography as the visual trope of the 'last (or eternal) sleep'.

By the late nineteenth century, photographic representations of the deceased dispensed with the life-suggestive poses, including the earlier practice of depicting the dead with open eyes. This transition paralleled the consolidation of photography as an autonomous artistic medium, marking its departure from earlier reliance on the compositional conventions of painting and the traditions of painted post-mortem portraiture. The recognition of death as an inescapable reality predated the invention of photography by many centuries. While photographic post-mortem portraiture largely displaced earlier artistic forms of representing the dead, most notably the mourning painted portrait, it should not be viewed as its direct successor. The mourning portrait, which experienced a rapid decline in popularity after the emergence of photography, belonged to a distinct historical and cultural framework and fulfilled different functions. Frequently, it portrayed the deceased as if still among the living, often seated upright and bearing a facial expression suggestive of vitality. Despite these technical divergences, both pictorial and photographic forms of post-mortem portraiture ultimately pursued the same essential objective: to shield the deceased from a "second death," namely, spiritual erasure from collective memory. It may be of interest here to follow André Bazin's discussion, analysing the use of

[13] Kakrides, 1986: 258–259.

visual representations for the preservation of life. He begins with Antiquity, especially the Egyptian mummies, to move to modernity, with the painted portraits and photography:

> Near the sarcophagus, along with the corn that would nourish the dead, the Egyptians were placing terracotta statuettes, as substitutes for mummies, which they would replace the bodies in case they were destroyed. This religious use, therefore, reveals the primal function of statuettes, namely the preservation of life through the representation of life. Another manifestation of the same kind is the clay bear along with the arrows found in prehistoric caves, a magical substitute for the identity of the living animal, which would ensure a successful hunting. The parallel development of art and culture has freed the plastic arts from their magical role. Louis XIV did not have himself embalmed. He was satisfied to stay alive through his portrait painted by Charles Le Brun. Culture cannot, however, banish completely the insatiable appetite of time. It can only downgrade our interest in it to the level of rational thought. No one believes in the ontological identity of model and image anymore, but everyone agrees that the image helps us remember the depicted and preserve them from a second spiritual death. Today, the creation of images no longer has an anthropocentric, utilitarian purpose. It is no longer about survival after death, but about a broader concept, the creation of an ideal world modeled after the real one, with its own time-related destiny.[14]

The reclining, sleep-like pose of the deceased emerges as the most recurrent feature reinterpreted in nineteenth-century photographic practice, whether through deliberate evocation or unconscious visual continuity. The deceased were depicted within their coffins or upon their deathbeds, typically with a pillow supporting the head and the eyes gently closed, conveying the impression of peaceful slumber. This formula, prevalent in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century post-mortem practice, can be understood as part of a long iconographic continuum whose origins extend to antiquity. Although this practice may not be classified as a direct reception of ancient iconographic motifs, it nevertheless represents a cultural parallel that facilitates a meaningful visual dialogue between the modern and the ancient worlds.

In post-mortem photography, the deceased is typically represented unambiguously as such: the absence of expression, the closed eyes, and the rigidity of the lifeless body leave no scope for illusion. Frequently, however, in an attempt to render death symbolically intelligible, the living may assimilate it to a state of sleep. This approach mirrors the perception of a child who, at a funeral, may believe the individual in the coffin is merely sleeping. The conceptual interchangeability of death and sleep within human consciousness does not seek to resolve the enigma of mortality; instead, it functions to alleviate the existential anxiety engendered by its mystery. This symbolic conflation of death with sleep extends beyond the realm of individual perception into the sphere of ritualised practice, not space- or time-specific; similar practices are found in other locales of the world (e.g., the reclining Buddha). Cultural and religious traditions often materialise this association through the physical arrangement of the body, positioning the deceased in a manner evocative of repose. Such corporeal presentation serves not only to soften the visual and emotional impact of death but also to embed it within a familiar and less threatening framework, thereby reinforcing the comforting illusion of continued rest rather than absolute cessation.

[14] Bazin, 1967: 9–10.

The sleeping posture of the deceased during the wake, a liminal period in which the living remain in proximity to the body, carries profound symbolic significance across nearly all religious traditions. Typically, the deceased is arranged in a position evocative of repose, with the head resting upon a pillow, thereby producing the impression of peaceful slumber. For example, in Catholic and Protestant funerary traditions in the United States, the viewing of the deceased during the wake requires a meticulous preparation of the body, undertaken by the funeral director to ensure its dignified presentation.[15] This preparation unfolds in two distinct stages, both designed to simulate the appearance of life. The first stage, embalming, involves replacing the blood with a preservative fluid that delays decomposition. The second stage, restorative cosmetology, consists of reconstructing the deceased's features through makeup, selecting appropriate clothing, and carefully arranging the body in the coffin. Together, these procedures produce for the mourners the visual impression of a figure peacefully at rest.[16] From a semiological perspective, embalming functions to efface the corporeal signs of death, namely decay, while restorative practices reintroduce the signs of vitality, thereby generating the illusion of slumber.[17] The success of this simulation also depends on the body's position within the coffin. If placed too low, the body may appear confined or compressed, while an excessively elevated position risks the impression of instability. The optimal placement, therefore, lies at an intermediate height, creating an image of repose that appears both natural and serene.[18]

This visual reference to 'eternal sleep', understood as a metaphor for eternal life, reflects the mourners' psychological difficulty in accepting the irrevocability of loss. By assimilating death to sleep, a state that inherently implies the possibility of awakening, bereaved individuals find a means of softening the emotional impact of mortality, rendering the act of parting more bearable than confronting death as a definitive cessation and passage into the unknown. From an iconological perspective, the illusion of sleep is a recurrent and visually potent motif in post-mortem photography. It appears in a wide range of compositions, from intimate close-up portraits to collective funeral scenes, and is observable across confessional boundaries, from Catholic to Orthodox traditions, and across the full spectrum of ages, from infants to the elderly. In these images, the subject's closed eyes and serene countenance invite the viewer to suspend the reality of death, sustaining instead the fiction of tranquil repose. Such imagery encapsulates a persistent cultural denial of life's absolute end, suggesting not annihilation but transition, an imagined movement into a parallel dimension to earthly existence, resonant with the 'Beyond' of the Ancient Greek worldview.[19]

Hesiod refers to Hypnos and Thanatos as "the terrible (δεινοὶ) gods".[20] In iconography, they are frequently depicted together as winged youths; for example, carrying the body of the warrior Sarpedon from the Trojan battlefield to his homeland, Lykia.[21] In this Homeric episode (Hom. *Il.* 16.666–683), although mortally wounded by Patroklos, Sarpedon is not immediately represented as dead. As soon

[15] Barley, 1983: 12–22. For a detailed account of the practice of embalming, Strub and Frederick, 1959. Similar steps are taken in Japan, for example, where the mortuary rites include elaborate steps to purify and present the deceased, Kim, 2012.
[16] Strub and Frederick, 1959: 11; Barley, 1983: 12–22.
[17] Strub and Frederick, 1959: 71.
[18] Barley, 1983: 12–22.
[19] The term 'beyond' is conceived as the enigmatic and unknowable state that follows death, conventionally described through metaphors such as the 'other side of the river', 'the other world', or, simply, the 'Underworld'. The uncertainty of what happens after death, the unknown of this 'beyond' has always provoked fear in man, Stampolidis and Economou, 2014: 19.
[20] Hes. *Theog*. 758–759: ἔνθα δὲ Νυκτὸς παῖδες ἐρεμνῆς οἰκί' ἔχουσιν, | Ὕπνος καὶ Θάνατος, δεινοὶ θεοί [trans. 'In there, the children of the dark Night have their houses, Sleep and Death, terrible gods.']
[21] Garland, 1985: 56–59; Oakley, 2004: 126–129.

as he is fatally struck by the Greek hero, Apollo, carrying out Zeus' command, takes possession of Sarpedon's body, washes it in the river, and clothes it in divine garments, signifying his descent from Zeus. Thereafter, Sleep and Death receive the body to transport it to Lykia, where a burial befitting one of Zeus' lineage may be performed. Throughout this entire process, the mortally wounded Sarpedon is not depicted as dead, but rather as peacefully asleep. Zeus allows him first to return to his homeland and to be reunited with his loved ones before ultimately surrendering to death. This episode underscores the ancient Greeks' beliefs about the inseparable bond between Sleep and Death, as well as the role of these two deities as guardians of the dead on their passage from life to death. Alexander Pope's translation of the episode below offers an artistic representation of the scene:

> Then thus to Phœbus, in the realms above,
> Spoke from his throne the cloud-compelling Jove:
> "Descend, my Phœbus! on the Phrygian plain,
> And from the fight, convey Sarpedon slain;
> Then bathe his body in the crystal flood,
> With dust dishonour'd, and deform'd with blood;
> O'er all his limbs ambrosial odours shed,
> And with celestial robes adorned the dead.
>
> Those rites discharged, his sacred corse bequeath
> To the soft arms of silent Sleep and Death.
> They to his friends the immortal charge shall bear;
> His friends a tomb and pyramid shall rear:
> What honour mortals after death receive,
> Those unavailing honours we may give!"
> Apollo bows, and from mount Ida's height,
> Swift to the field precipitates his flight;
> Thence from the war the breathless hero bore,
> Veil'd in a cloud, to silver Simois' shore;
> There bathed his honourable wounds, and dress'd
> His manly members in the immortal vest;
> And with perfumes of sweet ambrosial dews
> Restores his freshness, and his form renews.
> Then Sleep and Death, two twins of winged race,
> Of matchless swiftness, but of silent pace,
> Received Sarpedon, at the god's command,
> And in a moment reach'd the Lycian land;
> The corse amidst his weeping friends they laid
> Where endless honours wait the sacred shade.
>
> Pope, 1718: 268–269 (16.809–836)[22]

[22] Hom. *Il.* 16.666–683: καὶ τότ' Ἀπόλλωνα προσέφη νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς: | 'εἰ δ' ἄγε νῦν φίλε Φοῖβε, κελαινεφὲς αἷμα κάθηρον | ἐλθὼν ἐκ βελέων Σαρπηδόνα, καί μιν ἔπειτα | πολλὸν ἀπὸ πρὸ φέρων λοῦσον ποταμοῖο ῥοῇσι || χρῖσόν τ' ἀμβροσίῃ, περὶ δ' ἄμβροτα εἵματα ἕσσον: | πέμπε δέ μιν πομποῖσιν ἅμα κραιπνοῖσι φέρεσθαι | ὕπνῳ καὶ θανάτῳ διδυμάοσιν, οἵ ῥά μιν ὦκα | θήσουσ' ἐν Λυκίης εὐρείης πίονι δήμῳ, | ἔνθά ἑ ταρχύσουσι κασίγνητοί τε ἔται τε || τύμβῳ τε στήλῃ τε: τὸ γὰρ γέρας ἐστὶ θανόντων. | ὣς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἄρα πατρὸς ἀνηκούστησεν Ἀπόλλων. | βῆ δὲ κατ' Ἰδαίων ὀρέων ἐς φύλοπιν αἰνήν, | αὐτίκα δ' ἐκ βελέων Σαρπηδόνα δῖον ἀείρας | πολλὸν ἀπὸ πρὸ φέρων λοῦσεν ποταμοῖο ῥοῇσι || χρῖσέν τ' ἀμβροσίῃ, περὶ δ' ἄμβροτα εἵματα ἕσσε: | πέμπε δέ μιν πομποῖσιν ἅμα κραιπνοῖσι φέρεσθαι, | ὕπνῳ καὶ θανάτῳ διδυμάοσιν, οἵ ῥά μιν ὦκα | κάτθεσαν ἐν Λυκίης εὐρείης πίονι δήμῳ.

Figure 6. *Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death) Carrying the Body of the Deceased Sarpedon*; Red-figured kylix, c.510–490 BCE (BM 1841,0301.22, vase E12). Source: The British Museum, London.

This very scene has been very popular in vase iconography.[23] One excellent example is a red-figured *kylix* dating to the fifth century BCE, attributed to the Nikosthenes painter and presently housed in the British Museum (Figure 6). Rendered with the characteristic elegance of the red-figure technique, the figures are shown in graceful motion, their large wings extending outward as they support the limp form of the fallen hero. Each wears a helmet, a short chiton, a sword at his waist and a gauntlet. Sarpedon's body, portrayed with naturalistic anatomical detail, lies horizontally across the composition, his head slightly inclined, evoking not the stiffness of death but the serenity of sleep. The scene is framed by decorative motifs, including palmettes along the border, which enhance the vessel's symmetry and visual balance. The *kylix* would have been both a functional drinking vessel and an object laden with symbolic and narrative meaning, integrating myth and artistry.

Hypnos and Thanatos are often depicted similarly, typically shown together carrying the body of a fallen warrior, a visual motif recurrent in numerous examples of ancient pottery. This repetition underscores their shared role within Greek mythological and artistic tradition. Removing the fallen from the battlefield with solemn dignity, enacting a heroic conveyance that bestows respect and honour upon the dead, portraying them not as lifeless but merely as having lost consciousness. Such representations not only reaffirm the symbolic role of the twin gods as guardians of the dead but also reflect broader cultural values concerning death and the honorific treatment of the deceased.[24]

In the *Theogony*, Hesiod (*Op*. 762–766) refers to the two brothers, naming first Hypnos and then Thanatos:

> ἕτερος μὲν γῆν τε καὶ εὐρέα νῶτα θαλάσσης
> ἤσυχος ἀνστρέφεται καὶ μείλιχος ἀνθρώποισι·
> τοῦ δὲ σιδηρέη μὲν κραδίη, χάλκεον δέ οἱ ἦτορ
> νηλεὲς ἐν στήθεσσιν· ἔχει δ᾽ ὃν πρῶτα λάβῃσιν
> ἀνθρώπων· ἐχθρὸς δὲ καὶ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν
>
> One of them passes gently over the earth and the
> broad back of the sea, and it is soothing for human beings.
> But the other one's temper is of iron, and the bronze
> heart in his chest is pitiless: once he takes hold of any
> human, he owns him, and he is hateful even for the
> immortal gods.
>
> Hes. *Op*. 762 – 766 (trans. G. W. Most)

Although Thanatos is regarded as an unwelcome god, he is never portrayed in a hostile or malevolent light; instead, he is frequently depicted as a transporter and caretaker of the dead. His role is to bear fallen soldiers from the battlefield and offer them a proper burial. In visual representations, he does not appear to cause death himself, but rather to provide dignified care for those who have only just died. The meeting with Hypnos and Thanatos is portrayed as an honourable way to die.[25] Although Thanatos is described in ancient literature as a feared and detested deity, his visual representations consistently convey the notion of a dignified and respectful passage from the turmoil of life to a tranquil realm where

[23] Cf. Tsingarida, 2009.
[24] Dunn, 2023: 21; Gartziou-Tatti, 2023.
[25] Gartziou-Tatti, 2023.

the dead find repose. Pictorial illustrations of the relationship between death and sleep are numerous. Yet, there are many more literary references running through a shared cultural heritage, from antiquity up to the present day.

From Homer to modern Greek literature, death is often equated with sleep, and their interrelation is traced to the present day. For example, in the *Orphic Hymns* (87.5), it is Thanatos who gives "the living the big eternal sleep".[26] In Sophocles' play *Antigone* (76), the heroine tells her sister Ismene that once she passes away, she will rest forever along with the dead.[27] In early modern Greek poetry, the poet Andreas Kalvos writes in his *Philopatris* (Patriot):

> Ας μη μου δώση μοίρα μου
> εις ξένην γην τον τάφον·
> είναι γλυκύς ο θάνατος
> μόνον όταν κοιμώμεθα
> εις την πατρίδα.
>
> Give not to me, Fate,
> A grave in a foreign land;
> Death is sweet
> Only when we sleep
> in our homeland.

Similarly, in Greek Folklore and traditional lamentation songs (mourning songs), death is usually compared to deep sleep and the professional mourners call upon the dead to wake from the sweet sleep and open their eyes.[28] Most commonly, too, in Modern Greek, the relation between sleep and death is traced to the word *koimeterio* (cemetery), which is considered the place where the dead rest.[29]

Hypnos is traditionally depicted as a winged youth who induces sleep in weary mortals, either by moving gently over the earth and across the vast expanse of the sea, offering comfort and repose to humankind, or by sprinkling them with drops of the water of oblivion, administering soporific substances, or softly wafting his wings.[30] A notable example of this iconography is a small Roman statuette currently housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Figure 7), where Hypnos is portrayed as a nude youth preparing to take flight, sending humans into sleep. In his outstretched right hand, he holds a horn from which somniferous sap flows, while his lowered left hand holds poppy seeds. According to a variant of an ancient Greek myth, Hypnos was enamoured of Endymion, the King of Elis, and, to perpetually behold the king's beauty, the god lulled him into a state of rest with his eyes wide open.[31] This motif is frequently reflected in early post-mortem photographic portraits, where the deceased are depicted with open or half-open eyes, evoking a peaceful, eternal slumber.

The contribution of ancient Greek mythology to the understanding and management of death, as well as to broader aspects of human existence, is remarkable. At times, it laid the foundations for subsequent religious traditions, while in other instances it anticipated and transcended the stereotypes embedded within them. A particularly significant example that aligns the ancient Greek conception of

[26] *Hymn. Orph.* 87.5: τὸν μακρὸν ζωοῖσι φέρων αἰώνιον ὕπνον. Gartziou-Tatti, 2023.
[27] Soph. *Ant.* 76: ἐκεῖ γὰρ αἰεὶ κείσομαι.
[28] Anagnostopoulos, 1984: 202.
[29] Spyridakis, 1972: 185.
[30] Kakrides, 1986: 258–259.
[31] Kakrides, 1986: 259.

Figure 7. *Hypnos*; Roman copy of an early Greek original of the fourth century BCE, second century CE. Source: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Figure 8. *Funeral Couch*; fourth century BCE. Source: Archaeological Museum of Corinth, Corinth.

death with the notion of sleep, while attributing to the deceased the characteristics of a sleeper, is the fourth-century BCE marble funeral couch.[32] It was discovered in a burial chamber at Cheliotomylos in ancient Corinth (Figure 8). This archaeological find serves as evidence of the enduring human hope for the eternal sleep of the dead, a belief present since antiquity. As Kakrides indicates in his work, Greek Mythology, "Death, since ancient times, was called eternal sleep, the king of the dead, a common demon, sad, bitter and heavy, a means of oblivion but also a curer of diseases and a redeemer".[33] This marble bed is a gilded, porous, funeral couch, uncovered during excavations conducted by the American School of Classical Studies, and is now housed in the Archaeological Museum of Corinth. The dimensions of the bed indicate that it was amply sufficient to accommodate a single individual, yet scarcely spacious enough for two. According to the original publication of the find:

> 'The discovery of human ribs in the central opening of the aforementioned burial finding inevitably leads to the conclusion that the deceased was left on this stone couch, with his head towards the east, perhaps rest on real pillows that had been placed in the hollow stone support.'[34]

Interestingly, a parallel example can be found in literature. In Plato's *Laws* (947d–e), the philosopher gives clear-cut instructions for the public display, transfer and burial of the city's public auditors, which coincide with great precision with the findings in the Corinthian burial chamber.[35] Those who control the authorities (the public authorities) are entitled to an eternal rest, as a form of honorary distinction offered to them, as if they were alive:

> θήκην δὲ ὑπὸ γῆς αὐτοῖς εἰργασμένην εἶναι ψαλίδα προμήκη λίθων ποτίμων καὶ ἀγήρων εἰς δύναμιν, ἔχουσαν κλίνας παρ᾽ ἀλλήλας λιθίνας κειμένας, οὗ δὴ τὸν μακάριον γεγονότα θέντες, κύκλῳ χώσαντες, πέριξ δένδρων ἄλσος περιφυτεύσουσι πλὴν κώλου ἑνός, ὅπως ἂν αὔξην ὁ τάφος ἔχῃ ταύτην τὴν εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον ἐπιδεῆ χώματος τοῖς τιθεμένοις.
>
> Their tomb shall be constructed under ground, in the form of an oblong vault of spongy stone, as long-lasting as possible, and fitted with couches of stone set side by side; in this when they have laid him who is gone to his rest, they shall make a mound in a circle round it and plant thereon a grove of trees, save only at one extremity, so that at that point the tomb may for all time admit of enlargement, in case there be need of additional mounds for the buried.
>
> Pl. *Leg*. 947d–e (trans. J. Burnet)

We can have little doubt that in ancient Greece, both death and the dead were often ascribed attributes of the living. The portrayal of Hypnos and Thanatos as twin brothers not only underscored their close

[32] The funeral couch was initially dated to the late fifth century BCE. According to Manolis Papadakis, Assistant to the Associate Director of the Corinth Excavations at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, this dating was revised by researchers in 2010, and the funeral couch is now placed in the final quarter of the fourth century BCE.
[33] Kakrides, 1986: 259.
[34] Carpenter, Bon, and Parsons, 1936: 301: "It has been generally assumed that the funerary couch, which was a common custom in Etruria, was not a native Greek one. In a study of the marble funeral bed which was discovered in the somewhat later tomb of Eretria, it is believed that the influence was Macedonian. Plato's reference in his "Laws" to such a custom has been wrongly attributed to his knowledge of the Italian customs which he had acquired during his staying in Syracuse. It is very likely that the practice of placing a funeral bed in the tomb was not Attic, but it can no longer be argued that it is not Greek, or unknown in the classical period". For a fuller discussion, Carpenter, Bon, and Parsons, 1936: 62, 298–301.
[35] Carpenter, Bon, and Parsons, 1936: 301.

kinship but also strengthened the conceptual link between sleep and death, reinforcing the shared attributes and symbolic qualities that ancient Greek thought sought to assign to these deities. With the advent of photography in the mid-19th century, these symbolic concerns found a new medium.

In the early years following the invention of photography (ca. 1840–1850), the primary purpose of photographing the deceased was to enable relatives to preserve the memory of the departed's facial features, as it was doubtful that any other photographic likeness would have been taken during their lifetime. What initially constituted a simple visual record of the dead soon evolved into a more idealised representation, referred to in the literature as the 'last sleep'. The photographic portrayal of the deceased, intended to present them as sleeping, was typically undertaken during the *prosthesis* stage. This was the public display of the body for the final farewell, usually held on the day after their death. At this stage, the photographer paid particular attention to the image's composition to make the deceased appear asleep rather than dead.

Almost concurrently, another form of post-mortem representation emerged: the funeral photography. This type depicted the deceased in the company of family members and members of the wider community, often during the transfer of the body to its burial site. In many cases, these photographs were group portraits, sometimes staged in the deceased's own home, with relatives gathered around the body. In contrast to the 'last sleep' motif, in funeral photography, the fact of death was overtly apparent. Although the deceased was positioned in the same manner as during the *prosthesis*, often with a pillow supporting the head and the eyes gently closed as if in sleep, there was no attempt to conceal the reality that the central figure was no longer alive.

The way the deceased is treated, along with the social and cultural convictions, governs the prevailing type of depiction of the dead in each era. The mystery and the unknown surrounding death imposed on humankind the maintenance of the death customs invariable throughout centuries. The aforementioned rites of *prothesis* and transfer are rooted in antiquity and, along with the burial or cremation of the dead body, constitute the main customary funeral rituals of ancient Greeks that have endured to the present day, with very few variations. The ancient Greek funerary practices of *prothesis*, transfer, and burial (together constituting the funeral) have been known since the age of the Homeric poems (and, as archaeology often demonstrates, even before). It is in Homer that one can find the detailed records of Patroklos' (Hom. *Il.* 23) and Hector's funerals (Hom. *Il.* 24) in the *Iliad*. Funerary ceremonies in antiquity, as well as in the modern world, offered an opportunity for families to demonstrate their wealth, were governed by local funeral laws, and placed women under the responsibility of caring for the dead body, mourning the deceased, and maintaining the grave in a clean and decent state.[36]

The photographs we examine were created in an era when the social convictions treated death not as the end; the deceased were not dead but asleep. In particular, in the second half of the 19th century, people perceived death as the transfer to a state of bliss and rest. According to anthropologist Kenneth Ames:

> "People did not die. They went to sleep. They rested from their labors.
> The ugliness and the repulsiveness of death were disguised. The cemetery surrounded by the park minimized the terror of death. Death was referred and depicted through euphemisms: a rose with a broken stem, a finger pointing upward."[37]

[36] Garland, 1985: 21.

[37] Ames, 1981: 654–655. In this line of thought, Theo Cuyler (1873: 151–152), writing at the end of the 19th century, describes the Greenwood Cemetery in San Diego, CA, as a 'vast nursery' of sleeping children, equating it with a school's dormitory.

Figure 9. *Post-Mortem Portrait of Eleni Voulgari,* by Xenofon Vathi; c.1875. Source: National and Historical Museum, Athens.

According to this ideology, death was nothing more than a return home; a perspective that still exists strongly as a part of certain religious convictions. Irrespective of particular religious beliefs, the cemetery, with its monuments – often a place of artistic expression – can be interpreted as a transitional locus, where the living try to come to terms with the mystery of death.[38] In a similar vein, two photographic types suggest that the depicted deceased is not dead but merely asleep. The first, as mentioned above,

[38] Cf. Ames, 1981: 655.

is the 'last sleep', which presents the deceased as asleep and is associated, particularly among Orthodox Christians, within the religious belief of an afterlife. In England and the United States, the 'last sleep' type is found in the field of post-mortem photography, mainly during the 19th century, while the iconography of the deceased as a sleeper, as previously analysed, may be regarded as a cultural parallel to the motif of the gods Hypnos and Thanatos in ancient Greek vase painting.

This second type bears the distinctive designation "alive, yet dead" and portrays the deceased as if alive.[39] This type is characterised by the attempt to present the dead as living and is encountered primarily in England during the first decades of photography (1840–1880). In Greece, a variation of this style appeared, less imaginative, yet targeting the same result. The photographer did not intervene with the dead body during the shoot; all he had to do was rotate the final printed photograph by 90 degrees to give the impression that the deceased is standing in an upright position and thus appears alive. Through the proper process, the photographer intends to isolate the face to give it greater emphasis (Figure 9).

The similarity between classical depictions of Hypnos and Thanatos and specific types of post-mortem photography, such as the motif of the 'eternal sleep', raises questions regarding the influence of the former on the latter. To rephrase the question: one should consider the motif's reception. The available evidence indicates that 19th-century photographers did not refer to classical literature or Classical Antiquity *per se*. Yet the context remains the Grand Tour and its aftermath. Perhaps, the visual affinity between the depictions of Hypnos and Thanatos and the "last sleep" motif in photographic practice is best understood as a diffuse cultural parallel rather than the result of direct reception. Photographic manuals of the period focus on technical and compositional concerns, such as lighting, framing, and posing, rather than symbolic precedent. Photographers were primarily concerned with producing images that satisfied mourning practices and aesthetic conventions of sentimentality. However, the recurrence of motifs such as the reclined posture, closed eyes, and serene expressions suggests a persistent cultural memory of Hypnos and Thanatos, transmitted through ancient literature and painting, through societal and religious practices into modern visual representations, including photography.

Then, next to reception theories, we may employ the theoretical framework of the Annales School. If modern reception seems plausible but not definitive, the *longue durée* and the theory of mentalities provide a framework for understanding these motifs as part of a cultural substratum that transcends individual historical periods.[40] From this perspective, one can argue that the serene, sleep-like representation of death in ancient Greek art and literature is not merely an isolated iconographic choice but an expression of deeply rooted collective attitudes toward mortality that continue to resonate across the centuries. In the case of nineteenth-century post-mortem photography, the re-emergence of classical visual motifs is not the result of direct imitation (although the cultural context allowed for the cultivation of such knowledge of Classical Antiquity as part of its contemporary reception), but of a long cultural transmission in which inherited symbolic codes are unconsciously integrated into contemporary visual practices. Then, the photographic 'last sleep' emerges as a manifestation of an old and enduring cultural logic that links death with the tranquillity of sleep.

In other words, in the case of post-mortem photography, the type of 'last sleep' does not reflect a deliberate revival of classical mythology, but rather the persistence of symbolic and aesthetic patterns embedded in a shared cultural memory, at least in the parts of the world under discussion. These motifs, rooted in a long tradition of literature, art, and practice, continued to nourish visual culture, providing

[39] Ruby, 1995: 72.
[40] Within this new historical paradigm, the study of death and death-related phenomena emerged as an independent and autonomous field of research, see Tilly, 1978: 211.

a framework for representing death as peaceful, dignified, and comprehensible. In this sense, post-mortem photography may be regarded as part of a *longue durée* of symbolic representation, linking modern technological practice with ancient thought.

Conclusion

The memorial post-mortem photographs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, beyond constituting a photographic corpus of historical and sociological interest, reflect humanity's enduring concerns regarding death and the transition from life to death. Moreover, they reveal, in a certain sense, the denial with which the loss of loved ones is experienced. Early photographs, and particularly those that simulate death as sleep, thus embodying the motif of 'eternal sleep', reveal the widespread difficulty humans face in accepting loss and the definitive end of life.

The belief in eternal sleep following physical death had already emerged as a recurring motif in the ancient Greek world, expressed through (epic) poetry and mythology, particularly in the figures of Hypnos and Thanatos. Beyond its representation in the imaginative realms of myth and literature, archaeological excavations have demonstrated that the human need to preserve life after death led people to bury their dead as though they had merely fallen asleep, a practice that reflects the imaginative belief in eternal life.

From depictions in ancient Greek vase painting to photographic representations of the deceased in the modern era, one observes the enduring human need to perpetuate existence beyond the loss of material life. It manifests worldwide in various forms that could not be discussed in this paper. As a visual convention, the 'last sleep' or 'timeless sleep', although not a direct reception of the ancient images of Hypnos and Thanatos, constitutes a persistent cultural construct that embodies the dominant social sentiment toward the ineffability of death: "[o]ne is very cautious when talking in front of a corpse, lest one awakens it from death's big sleep. Silence is observed both in the death room as well as in the cemetery."[41]

[41] Ames, 1981: 654.

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Abstract (Greek) | Περίληψη

Στο άρθρο εξετάζεται η αναμνηστική μεταθανάτια φωτογραφία του 19ου και των αρχών του 20ού αιώνα μέσα από το πρίσμα της Κλασικής Αρχαιότητας, με έμφαση στο εικαστικό μοτίβο του «τελευταίου ύπνου» στη φωτογραφία και τη σύνδεσή του με τις αναπαραστάσεις του θανάτου στην αρχαιοελληνική παράδοση. Η φωτογράφιση των νεκρών εμφανίζεται ήδη από τις απαρχές της φωτογραφικής τεχνικής (1839), κυρίως ως μέσο διατήρησης της ανάμνησής τους, σε εποχές όπου τα φωτογραφικά πορτρέτα εν ζωή ήταν σπάνια. Οι νεκροί συχνά απεικονίζονταν σε στάση ύπνου, αντανακλώντας την πολιτισμική τάση να γίνει ο θάνατος περισσότερο κατανοητός και να αμβλυνθεί το συναισθηματικό βάρος της απώλειας.

Κεντρικό στοιχείο της μελέτης αποτελεί η σύνδεση ύπνου και θανάτου, όπως ενσαρκώνεται στους μυθολογικούς δίδυμους θεούς Ύπνο και Θάνατο. Στην αρχαία ελληνική γραμματεία, την αγγειογραφία και την ταφική τέχνη, ο θάνατος απεικονίζεται συχνά ως αιώνιος ύπνος, με τον νεκρό να αναπαρίσταται σε ήρεμη ανάπαυση ή να υποδηλώνεται ότι κοιμάται. Αναπαραστάσεις όπως η κύλικα του 5ου αι. π.Κ.Χ., όπου οι θεοί Ύπνος και Θάνατος μεταφέρουν τον Σαρπηδόνα από την Τροία στη Λυκία, ένα επεισόδιο γνωστό και από την Ιλιάδα, και η ταφική κλίνη του 4ου αι. π.Κ.Χ. που βρέθηκε σε τάφο στον Χελιωτόμυλο Κορίνθου, τεκμηριώνουν τη συμβολική θεώρηση του νεκρού ως «κοιμώμενου» και αναδεικνύουν την τελετουργική και υλική διάσταση αυτής της αντίληψης στην αρχαιότητα.

Η σύγκριση της κλασικής εικονογραφίας με τις μεταθανάτιες φωτογραφικές πρακτικές στην Ευρώπη, τις Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες και την Ελλάδα κατά τον 19ο και αρχές του 20ού αιώνα, φανερώνει ότι οι οπτικές συγγένειες μεταξύ αρχαίων και νεότερων αναπαραστάσεων αντανακλούν μια διαχρονική παρουσία του μοτίβου. Παρότι οι φωτογράφοι δεν φαίνεται να αντλούσαν συνειδητά από κλασικά πρότυπα, η επαναληπτικότητα ορισμένων οπτικών συμβάσεων, όπως η θέση του σώματος, τα κλειστά μάτια, η χρήση μαξιλαριών και οι ήρεμες εκφράσεις του προσώπου, υποδηλώνει τη διατήρηση βαθιά εδραιωμένων συμβολικών προτύπων.

Η μελέτη αξιοποιεί το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο της Σχολής των Annales, δίνοντας έμφαση στις έννοιες της *longue durée* και της θεωρίας των νοοτροπιών. Από αυτή την οπτική, το μοτίβο του «τελευταίου ύπνου» δεν νοείται ως άμεση αναβίωση της κλασικής εικονογραφίας, αλλά ως έκφραση ενός μακρόχρονου πολιτισμικού υποστρώματος που υπερβαίνει τις επιμέρους ιστορικές περιόδους. Στο πλαίσιο της ανάλυσης διακρίνονται τρεις τύποι φωτογραφικής μεταθανάτιας απεικόνισης: ο «τελευταίος ύπνος», που παρουσιάζει τον νεκρό να βρίσκεται σε ήρεμη ανάπαυση, ο τύπος «ζωντανός, αλλά νεκρός», που επιχειρεί να αποδώσει τον νεκρό με εκφραστικά χαρακτηριστικά ζωντανού ανθρώπου και ένας τελευταίος τύπος, η «φωτογραφία κηδείας», κατά την οποία ο νεκρός απεικονίζεται μαζί με τα συγγενικά του πρόσωπα και συχνά μαζί με άλλα μέλη της κοινότητας. Οι δύο πρώτοι τύποι αντανακλούν τη διαχρονική αγωνία του ανθρώπου απέναντι στο άγνωστο του θανάτου και την επιθυμία του να ματαιώσει, έστω συμβολικά, την αμετάκλητη συνθήκη του τέλους της ζωής.

Συμπερασματικά, η αναμνηστική μεταθανάτια φωτογραφία εντάσσεται στο πλαίσιο της *longue durée* πολιτισμικής συνέχειας, στην οποία οι αρχαίες αντιλήψεις για τον θάνατο ως αιώνιο ύπνο συνεχίζουν να διαμορφώνουν τη σύγχρονη οπτική κουλτούρα. Μέσω της φωτογραφίας, οι διαχρονικές πολιτισμικές στάσεις απέναντι στη θνητότητα αποκτούν νέα μορφή στο πλαίσιο της νεότερης οπτικής κουλτούρας.