



# **The Tragic Mask of Death**

## **A Comparative Study of Murder in Classical Tragedies and the New Testament**

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## Abstract

The study into the murders of the New Testament has not taken into consideration the ancient methods of civic punishment. This study aims to reach a better understanding of the methods and motives behind these murders in both the New Testament and the ancient Greek and Latin tragedies. The murders in question are the beheading of John the Baptist, the crucifixion of Jesus, the stoning of Stephen, the killing of Agamemnon, and the poisoning of Creon's daughter. The murders in the ancient tragedies were intended to be for entertainment, whereas the murders in the New Testament were seen as religious punishments. It was thought that there must be a deeper understanding of the murders and that there must be a driving force behind them. Therefore, each murder was separately analysed to distinguish the motive and ulterior motive behind each murder. It was discovered that there were various motives behind every murder, but the ulterior motive was superior to the motives. This means that each murder in both the New Testament and the classical tragedies was committed due to petty reasons and therefore, can be seen as petty murders.

## Abstrak

Die studie van die moorde in die Nuwe Testament het nooit die antieke metodes van publieke teregstellings in ag geneem nie. Hierdie studie beoog om 'n beter insig in die metodes en motiewe agter die moorde in beide die Nuwe Testament en die antieke Griekse en Latynse tragedies te verkry. Die moorde wat ondersoek word is die onthoofding van Johannes die Doper, die kruisiging van Jesus, die steniging van Stefanus, the moord op Agamemnon en die vergiftiging van Creon se dogter. Die moorde in die antieke tragedies het ten doel gehad om te dien as vermaak vir die publiek. Daarteenoor was die moorde in die Nuwe Testament gesien as openbare godsdienstige teregstellings. Die motivering agter die studie is om 'n dieper insig in die moorde te verkry en ook dryfkrag agter elke moord te vind. Vir hierdie rede is elke moord apart geanaliseer om te bepaal wat die motief was asook wat die bymotief agter elke moord was. Daar is gevind daar verskeie motiewe agter elke moord was, maar dat die bymotief die hoof dryfkrag van die motiewe was. Dit beteken dat elke moord in beide Nuwe Testament asook in die klassieke tragedies gepleeg is as gevolg van kleinlike motiewe en daarom word hierdie moorde gesien as kleinlike moorde.

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## **Abbreviations**

BCE	Before Common Era
CE	Common Era
TLG	Thesaurus Linguae Graeca
App.	Appian
<i>B Civ.</i>	<i>Bella Civilia</i> (The Civil Wars)
Plut.	Plutarch
<i>Vit.Ant.</i>	<i>Vitae Parallelae Antonius</i> (The Parallel Lives of Antony)
<i>Vit.Galb.</i>	<i>Vitae Parallelae Galba</i> (The Parallel Lives of Galba)
Tac.	Tacitus
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i> (The Annals)
Eur.	Euripides
<i>Med.</i>	<i>Medea</i>
Aesch.	Aeschylus
<i>Ag.</i>	<i>Agamemnon</i>
Sen.	Seneca (the Younger)
Eus.	Eusebius
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Cantica</i>	Song/ Passage in a comedy chanted or sung

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background to the study

Murder, in the present time, is seen as a crime for which the offender must be punished. Nevertheless, this was not always the case, for during the Roman Republic, murder was not seen as a crime. Furthermore, the Roman republican government had very little interest in containing murder, as the government was too dispersed to have its rule questioned by an act of murder (Gaughan, 2010:1). Ancient tragedies are mostly about mythical or historical characters. The tragedies have different motifs and themes to explain certain events. Some of the tragedian authors wrote tragedies about the same person, but they differ in terms of how the tragedian authors viewed the history and/or the myth involved in the tragedy. The main tragedian authors, also referred to as the ‘Fathers of tragedy’, are Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides (Greek tragedian authors) and Seneca the Younger (a Latin tragedian author). Tragedies were written for entertainment and are performed on a stage in front of an audience, while the New Testament texts are religious texts, or in other words biblical literature. According to Ehrman, the New Testament is seen by the Christians to be the sacred canon (2017:1). The first four books of the New Testament are called the “Gospels”, namely Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (Ehrman 2017: 3). It is said that the four Gospels were to proclaim the good news by telling, or by writing, the life and death of Jesus (Ehrman 2017: 3). The next book after John is the Acts of the Apostles and it is said that this book was written by the same author that wrote the third Gospel. It is also considered that the book can be seen as a sequel to the Gospel, for it describes shortly the history of early Christianity and it starts with the events that took place instantly after the death of Jesus (Ehrman 2017: 3).

This study will focus on the following tragedies: *Agamemnon* (Aeschylus), *Medea* (Euripides), *Medea* and *Agamemnon* (Seneca the Younger). These four tragedies were chosen because they provide detailed descriptions of murders and the reasons for these murders. Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* was initially part of the selection but was excluded, for the murder found in the tragedy does not fall within the requirements set out for this study. Ovid’s *Medea* will not be included in this study due to its fragmented nature. There are other Roman dramatic authors; however, only fragments have survived and it is too fragmented to place into context or to use as part of the argument. With regards to the New Testament, three specific murders were chosen that have enough detail about the murder as well as the reasons for it to happen. The three murders



of the New Testament that this study will focus on are the crucifixion of Jesus, the beheading of John the Baptist and the stoning of Stephen.

The first tragedy that will be looked at is Aeschylus's, *Agamemnon*, set in the period after the Trojan War, when Agamemnon is set to return to Greece along with all the soldiers and the prisoners of war. He returns with the princess of Troy, Cassandra, who prophesies about his end. Clytemnestra was angry at Agamemnon, for he sacrificed their daughter to go to war, and planned with her lover, Aegisthus, to kill him.

Written around the same time as Aeschylus, Euripides wrote the tragedy *Medea*. This tragedy is about Medea, a princess from Colchis and niece of Circe, who was married to Jason, a hero. They lived in Corinth and had two sons, but then Jason decided to end their marriage and marry the princess of Corinth, Glauke. Creon, the king of Corinth, drove Medea and her children out. She decided to give a robe and headband to the princess of Corinth; however, it was soaked in poison. The princess died, as well as anyone who subsequently touched her, including her father. A messenger brings the news to Medea that Jason is on his way; she then kills the children and flees on a chariot with their bodies. Seneca rewrote the same tragedies, namely *Agamemnon* and *Medea* in Latin a few centuries later.

Moving on from the tragedies, the murders in the New Testament will be the next section that will be discussed. The three murders in the New Testament have one point in common, namely the fact that all three murders were committed in Jerusalem, according to mainstream scholarship. The first murder that will be looked at is the beheading of John the Baptist. He was beheaded after he told King Herod that it is not lawful to marry the wife of your brother. Herodias, Herod's wife, resented John for saying this. On Herod's birthday, he said to Herodias' daughter that he would give her anything that she asked, but she first went to her mother for advice. Herodias told her daughter that she should ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod agreed to her request and sent an executioner to John's prison to behead him. The death of John is the starting point of the murders that followed his death, for he was also the bearer of Judaism. John the Baptist's death is followed by the crucifixion of Jesus, a disciple and follower of John the Baptist.

The crucifixion of Jesus took place after Jesus was arrested and tried before the high priest Caiaphas, the council and the chief priests subsequently. The council and the chief priests gave false testimony. They took Him to the governor, Pontius Pilate, for him to be tried for death.

Pilate released Barabbas, a prisoner and criminal, and gave the order that Jesus was to be crucified. He was then crucified by the Romans.

Stephen's murder happened after the murder of Jesus, for he was the first martyr in Christianity. Stephen was brought to appear before the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish elders, where they accused him of preaching against the Temple and the Mosaic Law. He was brought to the Sanhedrin, for the members of the synagogue felt humiliated when Stephen outwitted them when they tried to challenge his teachings. After Stephen gave a long speech about the history of Israel, the crowd became angry and dragged him outside the city and started stoning him.

By looking at the tragedies, it will be used to provide insight into the murders found in the New Testament and vice versa. The tragedies will be used as one side of the comparison with the New Testament, as well as the context of everyday life from the time of the tragedies. The reason why this study looks at both tragedies and the New Testament is to point out the differences and similarities between the two different literary types. The Greek tragedies were written a few centuries before the Latin tragedies, as well as the New Testament. However, even though there are a few centuries between the different texts, the emotions, such as hatred, as well as the motives for murder, stay the same. The study will also show that motives for murder have not changed throughout the centuries, for the same motive is found in both the tragedies and the New Testament. The title of this study, namely *The Tragic Mask of Death*, is seen as both a literal and figurative use of the word "mask". The literal use of mask refers to the ancient Greek theatre and plays where masks were used to portray characters. The figurative use of masks refers to the notion of hiding the truth or your true self behind a mask of happiness or innocence. With this in mind, the figurative mask regarding the deaths in both the classical tragedies and the New Testament appears as an execution but hides the true motive which makes it a murder.

Memory plays an important role in life, for history is derived from memory, which is seen to be an important part of one's existence after their passing. However, the ancient Romans coined a term named *damnatio memoriae*, which means roughly 'damning of the memory' and is also seen as an act to remove someone from history. This term and practice were often used concerning a Caesar who was believed to be a disgraceful Caesar, whose images were damaged or destroyed after their passing. For instance, after the passing of Nero, the noses of his busts or statuettes were broken off as a form of *damnatio memoriae*. *Damnatio memoriae* relates to

the topic of murder and motive, in the sense that the murderer tries to remove the memories of the victim by killing them in the most cruel and humiliating way.

Taking a closer look at the punishment methods Imperial Rome used can lead to a greater understanding of the methods and reasons behind murders in the New Testament as well as the motive for these murders. The focus of this research study is on the narrative context and the motives behind the characters' actions in the New Testament and not on the historical events that take place. To help with the narrative world and the motives behind the characters' actions in the New Testament, three other texts are used, namely the classical tragedies. There is an awareness of other backgrounds related to the murders, for instance political, ideological or socio-cultural background that could influence the motives. Having said that, these backgrounds are not part of the aim of the study, but the true nature of the study is to find out what the motive is behind the murders.

To determine the motives for the murders, the person who commits or instigates the murders must be pinpointed. There are certain laws found within the Imperial Roman judicial system that will determine the punishment for criminals and their respective crimes. The focus of this study will therefore be the concept of 'murder' by way of a close reading of these four tragedies in comparison with three significant murders in the New Testament. The aim is to determine whether the murders are considered a form of *damnatio memoriae*, or in other words the 'damning of the memory' or for petty reasons.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions**

As in any society, murder and death are not uncommon in the ancient world, and neither are the reasons for these types of deeds that are committed. The reasons for the murders stem from the circumstances or events that take place before the murders are committed. In most cases, certain events that happen first are the starting point of the domino effect that leads to murder. Therefore, this study will address the murders in various contexts as well as different literature to determine the reasons for the murders that were committed. The problem that this study will aim to address is the motive behind the murders found in the classical tragedies and the New Testament. In the search for the motives behind the murders, the genres of the texts will also be taken into account as to whether they influenced the motives.

A few primary research questions are derived from the problem statement, which are the following:

- Were the murders that the tragedians and New Testament authors wrote about, a result of religious sacrifice or pettiness?
- Can revenge serve as a motive for these murders in both the tragedies and the New Testament?

A secondary research question to accompany the primary research questions:

- Does emotion play a role as part of the circumstances leading up to murder?

### **1.3. Hypothesis**

The occurrences of murder in these tragedies were driven by pettiness and jealousy, while the occurrences of murder in the New Testament were murders driven by various motivations such as anger, jealousy, humiliation, and pettiness. Thus, it is suspected that pettiness plays a role in the motives for the murders in both the classical tragedies and the New Testament. The position or hypothesis that will be taken is to ascertain what the motives are behind the murders and whether pettiness played a role in the motives.

Pettiness can be seen as a small-minded or spiteful action, which is not motivated by logical reasoning and is therefore seen as a senseless act. Logical reasoning, in this sense, can be seen as intense jealousy, hatred or anger towards another person, which results in murder.

“Pettiness”, as well as “petty”, has a variety of different meanings and differs from the definition found in modern dictionaries. However, there are a few definitions that agree with the modern definition, for example, “small, little or unimportant matters”. Logical reasoning<sup>1</sup>, in separate terms, is defined as “reasonable” and “of reasoning”.

Anger, for example, is a great motivator for murder. Moreover, humiliation and anger are also a combination that leads to murder. As with anger, revenge is also seen as a motivator for murder. The murder of Agamemnon performed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra is the effect of anger, as well as revenge, for Clytemnestra was angry at Agamemnon for sacrificing their daughter. The stoning of Stephen can also be considered to be a murder motivated by anger, for the synagogue believed that he was preaching against the temple and the Mosaic Law. However, the stoning of Stephen can also be considered as a murder committed in terms of humiliation, for the members of the synagogue felt humiliated that Stephen outwitted them in terms of their doctrines and teachings.

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<sup>1</sup> See 1.4.2 Terminology section for definitions of “logical” and “reasoning”.

Jealousy is another great motivator for murder. Even though jealousy can be caused by various reasons, one of the reasons would be severe enough to commit a murder. The crucifixion can be seen as a murder motivated by jealousy, for the council and the chief priests wanted to crucify Jesus because he had a lot of followers, preached against their teachings and doctrines, and associated himself with sinners and people who were not welcome in the temple. The poisoning of Glauke, and indirectly Creon, can be seen as a murder committed by jealousy, as Medea was jealous that Jason was going to marry Glauke. However, Medea was also angry at Creon, because he ordered Medea to leave the kingdom.

In most cases, the reason for murder is not caused by anger or revenge but is based on petty reasons. Petty reasons for murder can be seen as some of the most dangerous reasons. There is not necessarily a motive or a proper reason for murder, but spur-of-the-moment. Medea murdering her children is a petty murder, for her only motivation for murdering her children was that she did not want Jason to have them. The beheading of John the Baptist is also a petty murder, for Herodias was angry at John the Baptist because he said that it is against the law to marry the wife of your brother.

#### **1.4. Methodology, Terminology and Theoretical Framework**

The presupposition set out for this study is that the murders that were committed in both the ancient tragedies and the New Testament texts were committed for petty reasons. This was based on the reading of the texts and noticing a pattern of petty reasons behind the murders. To determine whether the reasoning behind the murder is done with pettiness in mind or with an intended purpose in mind, modern terminology is used as the basis to determine the possible reasons for the murders.

When the primary research for this study was conducted, in other words, the reading of the ancient tragedies and the New Testament, the obvious and most logical deployed is a comparative analysis of these texts. The theory that will be applied to this study to show how this study will be done is based on the hermeneutical method. There are some discrepancies regarding hermeneutics, for there are beliefs that hermeneutics should be a method. However, there are other beliefs that hermeneutics can be used as a theory as well. Therefore, even though hermeneutics is seen as a method, it will be better served in this study as a theory since the study will be based on the interpretation of the texts. Exegesis will also be used as part of the theoretical framework, for it can be seen as the foundation for interpretation.

### 1.4.1. Methodology

This study will follow a comparative analytical reading of texts. It will compare Greek and Latin tragedies with selected texts from the New Testament. The Greek and Latin tragedies were selected based on the theme of murder. The Greek and Latin tragedies will first be read separately before they will be analysed in terms of the murders that are committed as well as how it was committed along with the reason behind them. The New Testament texts were selected with the central theme in mind, which is murder. The selected New Testament texts will be read thoroughly and analysed in terms of how the murders are committed as well as the reason behind the murders. The New Testament texts will also be analysed by using textual criticism to determine how the texts have been changed and whether there is any missing information that might contribute to the depiction of the murder as well as the act of the murder. After the Greek and Latin tragedies and the New Testament texts have been analysed, the different sections will be compared to each other to determine possible differences and similarities. After completing the analysis of the texts, it is presupposed that the motives behind many of these murders originated in pettiness.

The classical tragedies and the selected New Testament texts are compared with one another due to the theme being the same. Although the tragedies are plays and used for entertainment and the New Testament texts are religious texts, the genre does not play a role in the comparison, but rather the central theme. The tragedies and New Testament texts are analysed and compared with one another by using a broad background of the socio-cultural and socio-historical settings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The selected texts are analysed by reading the texts in their respective genres as well as by doing a deep reading of the selected texts. However, although the selected texts are read in their respective genres, the study will follow a thematic comparison by focusing on murder as the theme.

Comparative studies, or in other words, the study of comparing different thoughts, disciplines or the search for similarities, is an intricate study, for one has to be mindful of that which is being compared as well as whether or not there are any similarities between the objects that are being compared or any differences. One scholar, namely van Hoecke (2021:224), describes in detail what comparative studies is about, namely,

Comparison, and most notably looking for similarities, aims at *reducing the complexity of our world* by reducing an unlimited amount of data to a more surveyable number of categories. A comparison within a scholarly context will always aim at *understanding*

commonalities and differences [...]. Comparing always takes place within some framework, such as relevant criteria; but scholarly comparison may always affect the initial theoretical framework.

If Van Hoecke's definition and explanation of a comparative method are accepted as reasonable, then it stands to reason that a comparative analysis is a method that reduces the complexity of the world. Perhaps this method reduces not only the complexity of the world but also the complexity of the texts or literature that is being studied. Using comparisons helps to understand the text better and makes it easier to study the texts. Based on the above quote, it can be seen how the method will affect the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework and the method will work together concerning this study, and it will make the analysis and understanding of the texts easier. Therefore, by comparing the texts with one another, the interpretation of the texts becomes clearer.

Continuing with this thought, another scholar, namely Lange (2013:19), defines 'comparative methods' in the glossary section of the book, which he defined as the following,

Diverse methods used in the social sciences that offer insight through cross-case comparison. For this, they compare the characteristics of different cases and highlight similarities and differences between them. Comparative methods are usually used to explore causes that are common among a set of cases. They are commonly used in all social scientific disciplines.

By looking at this quote, it would appear that cases are compared to one another to show the similarities and differences. Although the same victim is referred to, the methods differ in the different versions of the texts. In terms of this study, texts from different genres are compared to one another with a focus on the murders that are committed in each text, and the differences and similarities will be highlighted in terms of the method of the murder as well as the possible reason behind the murder.

#### **1.4.2. Terminology**

To determine the reasoning behind the murders, a distinction must be brought to light between logical reasoning and pettiness, for the basis of the argument of this study is whether the murders were committed for petty reasons or whether there was an intended purpose behind the gruesome act of violence.

According to the *Britannica Dictionary Online*<sup>2</sup>, the definition of “petty” is as follows:

1. a: not very important or serious.  
b: relating to things that are not very important or serious.  
c: committing crimes that are not very serious.
- 2: treating people harshly and unfairly because of things that are not very important

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*<sup>3</sup>, the definition of “petty” is the following:

- I: senses relating to relative importance.
2. a: of little importance, insignificant, trivial. Frequently *depreciative*.  
b. of persons, their behaviour, etc.: characterised by an undue concern for trivial matters, esp, in a small-minded or spiteful way. Now usually *depreciative*.

With regards to the definition of “pettiness”, the *Oxford English Dictionary*<sup>4</sup> sets out the following definition of the word:

- 1: the quality of being petty; triviality, insignificance; small-mindedness.
- 2: as a count noun: an instance of small-mindedness; a petty trait or act. Formerly also: a petty or trivial object (*obsolete*). Usually in *plural*.

The meaning of pettiness can be understood in various ways, especially during ancient times. By looking at the definitions of petty and pettiness, it can be seen as the idea of getting angry over things that are seen as unimportant. Although the motives might be seen as petty to the reader, these motives were experienced as a very serious driving force to the offenders in the texts. These definitions will play a role in the analysis of the texts.

Murder, on the other hand, can become somewhat complicated regarding definitions. A few definitions will be looked at, which include murder, execution, and homicide. The definitions of both murder and execution will play a vital role in the analysis of the New Testament texts, for the deaths are presented as executions, but will be argued as murders.

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<sup>2</sup> Online link to source: <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/petty>

<sup>3</sup> Online link to source: <https://www-oed-com.ez.sun.ac.za/view/Entry/141994?redirectedFrom=petty#eid>

<sup>4</sup> Online link to source: <https://www-oed-com.ez.sun.ac.za/view/Entry/141983?redirectedFrom=pettiness#eid>



The *Britannica Dictionary Online* define “murder”, “execution” and “homicide” in the following way:

#### Murder<sup>5</sup>

- 1: the crime of deliberately killing a person.
- 2: to kill (a person) in a deliberate and unlawful way: to commit the murder of (someone).

#### Execution<sup>6</sup>

- 1: the act of killing someone especially as punishment for a crime

#### Homicide<sup>7</sup>

- 1: the act of killing another person

In turn, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “murder”, “execution” and “homicide” as follows:

#### Murder

- 1: to kill (a person) unlawfully, *spec.* with malice aforethought; to kill (a person) wickedly, inhumanly, or barbarously.<sup>8</sup>
- 1: the action or an act of killing.<sup>9</sup>
- 1. a: the deliberate and unlawful killing of a human being, esp. in a premeditated manner; (*Law*) criminal homicide with malice aforethought (occasionally more fully **wilful murder**)
- b: terrible slaughter, massacre, loss of life; an instance of this. *Obsolete.*
- c: the action of killing or causing destruction of life, regarded as wicked and morally reprehensible irrespective of its legality (e.g. in relation to war, death sentences passed down by tribunals, and other socially sanctioned acts of killing); an instance of this.

<sup>5</sup> Online link to source: <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/murder>

<sup>6</sup> Online link to source: <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/execution>

<sup>7</sup> Online link to source: <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/homicide>

<sup>8</sup> Online link to source: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/murder\\_v?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#35501102](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/murder_v?tab=meaning_and_use#35501102)

<sup>9</sup> Online link to source: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/murder\\_n1?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#35497890](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/murder_n1?tab=meaning_and_use#35497890)

## Execution<sup>10</sup>

1: the action of execution; the state or fact of being executed.

## Homicide

1: to kill or murder (a person).<sup>11</sup>

2: the action or an act of killing another human being; *esp.* the crime of causing another person's death.<sup>12</sup>

3: a person who unlawfully kills another.<sup>13</sup>

The definitions of murder, homicide and execution reveal a clear distinction between the different acts of death. "Murder" and "homicide", on the one hand, show that death is an act of killing someone with intentional malice as well as unlawful. One definition that stood out for "murder" was the definition found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* which states that murder is to kill someone "wickedly, inhumanly, or barbarously". Execution, on the other hand, is defined as the action of execution or executing someone as the punishment for a crime. Therefore, execution is seen as the collective decision to punish someone by taking his life.

With regards to the definitions of logical reasoning, 'logical reasoning' will be defined separately, for it appears that the combination of the two words does not appear together in a dictionary.

According to the *Britannica Dictionary Online*, the definition of "logical" and "reasoning" is as follows:

## Logical

1: [more logical; most logical]: Agreeing with the rules of logic: sensible or reasonable.

2: Of or relating to the formal processes used in thinking and reasoning.

## Reasoning

1: The process of thinking about something in a logical way in order to form a conclusion or judgement.

<sup>10</sup> Online link to source: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/execution\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#4985674](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/execution_n?tab=meaning_and_use#4985674)

<sup>11</sup> Online link to source: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/homicide\\_v?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#1497122](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/homicide_v?tab=meaning_and_use#1497122)

<sup>12</sup> Online link to source: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/homicide\\_n1?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#1496996](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/homicide_n1?tab=meaning_and_use#1496996)

<sup>13</sup> Online link to source: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/homicide\\_n2?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#1496842](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/homicide_n2?tab=meaning_and_use#1496842)

2: The ability of the mind to think and understand things in a logical way.

The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines “logical” and “reasoning” in the following way:

Logical<sup>14</sup>

1. a: Of or pertaining to logic, of the nature of formal argument.
- 2: That is in accordance with the principles of logic; conformable to the laws of correct reasoning.
- 3: That follows as a reasonable inference or natural consequence; that is in accordance with the ‘logic’ of events, of human character, etc.
- 5: [*nonce-uses*, after Greek λογικός.] Characterized by reason; rationale, reasonable.

Reasoning<sup>15</sup> (noun)

- 1: The action of *reason* v<sup>16</sup>.; esp. the process by which one judgement is deduced from another or others which are given.

Reasoning<sup>17</sup> (adjective)

- 1: That reasons (in various senses).

Thus, by combining the definitions of “logical” and “reasoning”, one has a definition that more or less relates to the idea that it is an argument about the principles of logic and the ability to think and understand things in a logical way to form a conclusion. It can also be seen as a form of a formal argument and the practice of using one’s reasons to deduce a judgement of said reasons. Once again, the reasoning behind these murders may appear logical to the offender, but it may not be the case for the reader.

### **1.4.3. Theoretical Framework**

The theory used for this study will be based on a hermeneutical literary thematic approach, which is how I will address the theme of the study. The presupposition regarding the study is that pettiness played a role in the motives behind each murder, for the study’s purpose is to pinpoint the motives behind the murders. I chose the specific Greek and Latin tragedies because

<sup>14</sup> Online link to source: <https://www-oed-com.ez.sun.ac.za/view/Entry/109791?rskey=79LzOD&result=1#eid>

<sup>15</sup> Online link to source: <https://www-oed-com.ez.sun.ac.za/view/Entry/159081?rskey=5AGYK1&result=2#eid>

<sup>16</sup> Own emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> Online link to source: <https://www-oed-com.ez.sun.ac.za/view/Entry/159082?rskey=5AGYK1&result=3#eid>

I have a background in Ancient Cultures with a focus on ancient literature from Ancient Greece and Rome. I chose the selected texts from the New Testament, for it is my current research field. The tragedies that will be used were selected after reading through a few tragedies and discovering a common theme between some of the tragedies. Thus, these tragedies were chosen based on the theme of murder. The selected New Testament texts were chosen based on this theme of murder. As mentioned above, the genre for the Greek and Latin plays is tragedy, a form of theatre and entertainment. The genre for the New Testament texts are religious texts. The time period for the Greek tragedies is *circa* 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the Latin tragedies and New Testament texts are *circa* 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.

Literature as a means of narrating death plays a significant role in introducing the protagonist. There are different literary types that will be used in the study, for instance the tragedies can be seen to belong to the same category as screenplay texts whereas the Gospels are seen as narrative texts and therefore the comparison will be between texts written for entertainment and religious purposes. The theoretical framework will be based on the method known as hermeneutics as well as exegesis. As explained in the introductory section of the methodology and theoretical framework, hermeneutics is regarded as a method, but for the purposes of this study it will serve a better purpose as a theory in terms of how this study will be conducted. Exegesis will also be used to conduct this study, for the purpose of the fact that it is directly connected to the studies of the New Testament and is seen as the foundation for interpretation.

Hermeneutics has traditionally been defined as the study of the locus of meaning and the principles of interpretation. Biblical hermeneutics, then, studies the locus of meaning and principles of biblical interpretation. Hermeneutics in the broad sense is bipolar: exegesis and interpretation. Exegesis is the process of examining a text to ascertain what its first readers would have understood it to mean. [...] Interpretation is the task of explaining or drawing out the implications of that understanding for contemporary readers or hearers (Tate 2008:1).

The quote above by Tate explains in the most basic wording the difference between exegesis and interpretation. This quote is applicable to the study, for this is the theory that the study will be built upon, and how this study will be conducted. Tate has given the foundation for the study with regards to this quote, for he explains in detail and by using simple words that hermeneutics is not only interpretation, but that it consists out of two areas, namely exegesis and interpretation.

According to Tate (2008: 11), exegesis must never be overwhelmed by application, but must precede it. Thus, the exegetical questions must be answered before the questions of application may be rightfully asked. An interesting point that is made regarding exegesis is the following, “In light of this, one of the cardinal rules of exegesis is that the interpreter must always approach and analyze the *text* in part or in whole within contexts: historical, cultural, geographical, ecclesiastical, ideological, and literary. *Exegesis* is the spadework for *interpretation*” (Tate 2008:11). This is an interesting point, for it shows the different areas that are found in exegesis, and choosing to pursue one specific area determines the course that the study will take. In the case of this study, the area of exegesis that will be pursued is the literary area as well as the cultural area. The cultural area will play a very important role, for it is the cultural practices of the cultures as well as the societies surrounding the texts that will help with determining the murder method as well as the possible reasons. The literary area will also play a vital role in the study because the studying of the literature will determine the reasons behind the murders as well as the practices that were used.

Background studies, especially exegesis, are a necessary imperative for the explanation of the possible textual meaning. As stated by Tate, “While it is true that texts exist and are valued independently of their originating circumstances, a knowledge of those originating circumstances will inevitably increase the appreciation of a text” (2008: 11). This sentence can be seen to be quite valuable as well as true, for a text can be interpreted in any different way. However, the background of the text, in other words the historical background or the cultural background of the text plays a vital role in understanding the text better and helping to form the interpretation of the text.

According to Tate, there are two areas in which background studies are divided into, namely semantics and pragmatics. Where semantics is the study of the language in a text, pragmatics is the study of the “circumstances surrounding the individual linguistic expressions.” Exegesis must, therefore, give equal representation to both areas (Tate 2008:19). Tate (2008:19) continues to describe the difference between semantics and pragmatics by saying the following,

*Text* refers to the study of the actual words of the text; *co-text* is concerned with the relationships between words in sentences, paragraphs, and chapters; and *context* focuses on the historical and sociological setting of the text. The first two areas are the concern of semantics, while the latter is the domain of pragmatics. [...] Therefore,

exegesis must be concerned with the explication of utterances, not sentences. This means that *pragmatics* must be an integral part of exegesis.

This quote by Tate shows the importance of there being more to background studies than one imagines. For instance, there are two areas of background studies: semantics and pragmatics. Nevertheless, the divisions are made without one realising that there is a division as well as the fact that one tends to focus on one area more than the other without realising it. With regards to this study, the context of the texts, as well as the text itself (studying the words of the text), will play an important role. The words in the text will be important, for it is the words that make up the sentences that will reveal the methods as well as the reasons for the murders. The context of the texts is important, for it is the context that reveal whether or not these methods are standard practices and the circumstances in which these practices are used. Thus, it would appear that both areas of background studies will be used in this study, in other words both semantics and pragmatics, but it would seem that the main focus would be on pragmatics rather than semantics.

According to Porter and Robinson (2011: 2), the term “hermeneutics” is derived from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, which translated means “to interpret” or “to translate”. Having said that, the origin word for hermeneutics stands true to the focus point of the study, which is the interpretation of texts as well as the translation of the texts for the sake of the attempt to prove the reasons behind the murders that will be analysed. A division of hermeneutics is known as the romantic hermeneutics, which is associated with Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. However, the hermeneutics prior to Schleiermacher was separated into specialised forms along with biblical hermeneutics. Biblical hermeneutics was also practically identical to exegesis as the “objective to texts” (Porter & Robinson 2011:7-8). Continuing further with the romantic hermeneutics, due to the contribution of Schleiermacher to this field and followed closely by Dilthey, “the notion of hermeneutics as a matter of practical exegetical operation between text and reader is generalized to include much broader concerns related to the nature of human understanding” (Porter & Robinson 2011:8). However, the romantic hermeneutics associated with Schleiermacher is still relevant to biblical texts, even though he refutes the fact that interpretation of the sacred literature indeed holds “a special place among the other literature or that it deserves a unique interpretive method” (Porter & Robinson 2011:8).

The above section that serves as background for the reason why hermeneutics will serve as a theory is based on the Greek origin of the word, but also hermeneutics prior to Schleiermacher’s

contributions that has a separate specialised form, namely biblical hermeneutics. The interesting part regarding biblical hermeneutics is the fact that it is similar to exegesis, which is seen as the foundation for interpretation.

The article *Death in Greek Tragedy* lists five different forms of death that are found in Greek tragedies. Even though this article focuses only on Greek tragedies, the same argument of these different forms of death can be applied to the New Testament. These different forms of death add to the receiving of the tragedies and the effectiveness of the death scene. The five different forms of death are: 'Remote Death', 'The "Grand Guignol" Type of Death and the Holocaust', 'Faked and Miraculous Death', 'Deferred Death' and 'Secret Death and Death Through Ambush'. However, not all different forms of death are applicable to the literature. Thus, only two forms of death will be applicable to some of the literature. These two forms are 'The "Grand Guignol" Type of Death and the Holocaust' and 'Secret Death and Death Through Ambush'.

There have been many forms of death found in legends that date back to Homeric epics; however, many were an invention of the tragedians. When a violent death takes place in Greek legend, it is usually preceded by the damaging of the heroic measurements and is also usually combined with excessive appalling detail (Sri Pathmanathan, 1965:5-6). In terms of the 'Grand Guignol'<sup>18</sup> Type of Death and the Holocaust, certain deaths can only be reported by a messenger, for the depiction of stage would not be conveyed as vividly as when a messenger reports it. For instance, when Glauke and Creon encounters Medea's death-dealing gift in *Medea*, the whole scene could not be depicted on stage in the same way as when someone describes what they see in detail. Therefore, it is presented in a 'Grand Guignol' way (Sri Pathmanathan, 1965: 6).

'Secret Death and Death Through Ambush' is when a death also takes place off stage in a location unknown or when the death happens due to an ambush. With this form of death, the Chorus plays a big role. The Chorus in Greek tragedy was not merely part of stage décor, in a sense, and it was not expected of them to interfere with what is happening on stage. However, the dramatist uses the Chorus so that the audience pays attention to them as well as their reaction as to what is happening or what they hear is happening (Sri Pathmanathan, 1965: 8). For instance, in *Agamemnon*, when the Chorus hears the cries of Agamemnon off stage, they

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<sup>18</sup> The 'Grand Guignol' refers to a theatre in Paris where naturalistic horror shows were performed. But having said that, the reference to the Parisian theatre is not relevant to this study.

are contemplating whether or not they should help their king. When Aegisthus appears, a type of conflict is evident between him and the Chorus. In *Medea*, the Chorus is first sympathetic with Medea, who is being cast out by Jason, but they are later horrified with her actions, especially the actions she took against her children (Sri Pathmanathan, 1965:9).

By using the descriptions of different deaths that are found in the above-mentioned article, these descriptions, or in other words categories of deaths, are applicable not only to the Greek and Latin tragedies but also to the New Testament. The ‘Grand Guignol’ Type of Death and the Holocaust can be applied to two deaths in the New Testament. In terms of death reported by a messenger, in the New Testament, the death of John the Baptist was announced when his head was delivered to Herodias. The death of John the Baptist is also seen as a Remote Death, since the death takes place in the prison. Similarly, the death of Jesus was not announced by messenger, but was made known when the curtain of the temple was torn in two and the earth shook. Secret Death and Death Through Ambush can be applied to the third death that will be analysed and discussed in this study, namely the stoning of Stephen. This particular death could be seen as a form of ambush, for the members of Sanhedrin dragged Stephen outside the city, without any warning or idea that this action will take place, where they stoned him to death.

### **1.5. Research design and Outline**

The study will be investigated by means of a close reading and analysis of the literature chosen to be part of the study. This study will require five chapters. The first chapter of this study will be the introductory chapter that will set out the problem statement along with the research questions and the hypothesis. The methodology and theoretical framework will also be set out in this chapter. As the introductory chapter, it will also contain the presuppositions set out for this study, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

The second chapter will be the background chapter. The background chapter will play a role in providing a socio-cultural as well as a socio-historical foundation which the third and fourth chapters will use in the analysis of the texts to discover the motives for the murders. The background chapter begins with the origin of Greek tragedies, for Greek tragedies are the foundation for the Latin tragedies. The Latin tragedies will then be discussed along with the origin of the Roman theatre, for public executions have their origin in the performances held in the Roman theatres. Capital punishment in Ancient Greece is discussed, followed by an extensive background of the capital punishment used in Ancient Rome. Some of the capital punishments that are discussed are beheading, crucifixion and stoning.



The third chapter is focused on the in-depth analysis of the murders found in the various New Testament texts. The selected New Testament texts and murders that form the major focus point of this study are: the beheading of John the Baptist (with the focus on Mark 6: 14-29), the crucifixion of Jesus (with the focus on Matthew 26: 1-5, Matthew 27: 33-56; Luke 22: 1-2, Luke 23: 26-49) and the stoning of Stephen (with the focus on Acts 7:1, 54-58 and 8:1). The selected texts are analysed with the help of commentaries as well as the second chapter. The analysis of the texts will assist in finding the motives behind the murders.

The fourth chapter is focused on the in-depth analysis of the murders found in the Greek and Latin tragedies. The study focuses on four tragedies, both ancient Greek and Latin versions. The two Greek versions were written by the 'Fathers of tragedy', namely Aeschylus and Euripides. The two Latin versions were written by the Stoic philosopher, Seneca the Younger. The tragedies that are the focus point of this study are: *Agamemnon* and *Medea*. The selected texts are analysed with the help of the second chapter as well as secondary literature. The analysis of the tragedies will assist in finding the motives behind the murders.

The fifth and final chapter concludes this study with a summary of the main arguments as well as the findings of the comparison between the third and fourth chapter. The main findings will be set out, as well as the motives for the murders and whether pettiness played a role in the motives.

## 2. Death, Theatre and Execution

### A Background Study

#### 1. Introduction

Reading a text does not always provide ample information regarding socio-cultural and socio-historical aspects of a civilisation. A background is needed in order to gain a better understanding why certain methods were used and how different punishments were used for different social groups of the time period. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to provide a socio-cultural and socio-historical foundation that is needed for the analysis of the texts of this study. The chapter is used to gain a better understanding of the methods used for the murder, for example, the reason why crucifixion was used and on which social groups. The chapter will first look at ancient Greek tragedies and then ancient Roman tragedies. The Greek tragedies will be discussed first, for these were first translated into Latin and then used as the foundation for the Roman tragedies. The Roman tragedies, which were first performed as part for entertainment purposes, later became the stage for executions in an entertaining manner. The ancient Roman theatres will then be discussed, as this was used as a place of performance, and which became a place of public executions. A brief discussion regarding *damnatio memoriae*<sup>19</sup> follows due to it being a practice in ancient Rome for removing those the Romans deemed unworthy to be remembered in history. This will be part of the analysis of the murders found in the New Testament. Death and punishment in ancient Greece will also be briefly discussed. This section will consider a few methods that were used to punish criminals and includes a short section on stoning, which will be used for the section of Stephen. Finally, the last section will be about death and punishment in ancient Rome, which includes an overview of how citizens were punished with capital punishment and who were the ones that were punished the most. This section will also contain sub-sections regarding crucifixion, beheading and stoning. This last section will be used in the analysis of the murders found in the New Testament.

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<sup>19</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Damnation of the memory/Erasing all records/images of the defeated rival”. *Damnatio*.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=damnatio&la=la#Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=damnatio-contents> / *Memoriae*.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=memoriae&la=la#Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=damnatio-contents>

Translations of Latin words/phrases are made using *Perseus Digital Library*.

The historical context, which is also part of exegesis, is seen to be quite important, for the practices of different cultures and societies are found in the historical context. Thus, this background chapter can be seen as the foundation of this study, for in order to gain a better understanding of the murders found in the Greek and Latin tragedies as well as the New Testament, the practices must first be understood. In other words, the origin and practices of the tragedies and their role in the theatre is important in order to analyse and understand the murders found in the tragedies. Death and punishment, along with capital punishment, is important to further understand the murders in the tragedies, but also to fully understand why certain methods of death were used in the New Testament. The time period in which these texts were written is also important, especially with regards to the New Testament and the Imperial Roman Period.

The Imperial Roman Period marks the period after the assassination of Julius Caesar when his adopted son, Octavian, took over (Aldrete 2004: 18). During the reign of Nero, a fire broke out in the city in 64 CE and destroyed ten of the fourteen regions. Nero rebuilt the city and also constructed wider roads as well as a new palace for himself named the Domus Aurea, or in other words the Golden House. After the passing of Nero, the Flavian family decided to give back to the city and destroyed the Domus Aurea and constructed the Flavian Amphitheatre, which is known as the Colosseum in present times (Aldrete 2004: 19).

As mentioned above, ancient Greek tragedies became the starting point for the ancient Roman tragedies and ancient Greek tragedies will also be analysed in Chapter 4. The tragedies chosen for Chapter 4 are also based on the murder theme; however, due to tragedies being a different genre than the texts from the New Testament, they will be analysed differently. Thus, certain factors are required for background information to understand the way that tragedies are produced, performed and understood.

## **2. Ancient Greek Tragedies**

The origin of tragedy is noted down in Aristotle's *Poetics*, according, which there are five possibilities for the origin of tragedy. The first possibility for the origin was considered to come from an improvisatory origin from the leaders of the dithyramb<sup>20</sup>. The second possibility was the fact that Aeschylus increased the number of actors from one to two, reduced the choral part, and also made the part that was spoken as the 'protagonist' (Seaford, Easterling & Macintosh

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<sup>20</sup> A dithyramb was a cult song with Dionysiac content, and it was also classified as a choral song that was sung in honour of Dionysus (Zimmermann 2012:469).

2012:1493). Another possibility was that Sophocles added another actor and also introduced scene-painting to portray different settings. A fourth possibility was that tragedy evolved from satyr plays and became slow-moving by becoming more serious and discarding the small plots and their absurd language or wording. And the final possibility was that the meter changed from trochaic tetrameter to iambic trimeter<sup>21</sup> (Seaford, Easterling & Macintosh 2012:1493).

According to Hall, the word ‘tragedy’ was given to the more serious theatrical performances. Nonetheless, the term originally could have meant ‘goat-song’, since it was a reminder of the connection tragedy had with religion, especially since it was with rituals that included praises of the gods along with an animal sacrifice (2010:1). Tragedy is, by definition, a form of drama, and it was invented in Athens during the sixth century BCE. From what is gathered by the surviving plays and fragments, these plays were composed for the purpose of being performed at the Athenian festivals of Dionysus, mostly in the City Dionysia. Most of the surviving plays are from the fifth century BCE; however, new tragedies were still being produced until the middle of the third century BCE (Scodel 2011:2). Furthermore, as stated by Hall (2010:4), a tragedy that did not intend to portray any form of suffering with the support of a build-up could not be seen as tragic. A tragedy always contains agony (Hall 2010:4). The ancient audience is more accurately called ‘spectators’, for the word *theatre* (θέατρον) is translated as “a place for seeing” (Hall 2010:8). Munteanu (2012:2) claims that scholars have highlighted the importance of emotions in the Greek tragedies for the fifth-century audiences, for they expected that the tragedians would move them as well as entertain them. Nonetheless, she states that the modern interpretations of the ancient texts made the emotional responses to the tragedy less important than to the social realities or politics (Munteanu 2012:9). The success of a tragedy is derived from the specific relationship between that of the poet and the audience (Munteanu 2012:51).

There are various sources that assert that dithyramb and tragedy are considered to be very similar with regards to belonging to the same category (Scullion 2005:26). According to Scullion (2005:27), the connection of the dithyramb with tragedy found in the Athenian festivals would be inclined to support such a use, especially since dithyramps were also given titles, just as it is done with tragedies. Larson (2007:126) asserts that the *dithurambos* was

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<sup>21</sup> There are two different types of Greek meter. The iambic meter follows the pattern of x-u- and the trochaic metre follows the pattern of -u-x. These patterns suggest that the rhythm that was needed in order to sing whichever follows this metre (Parker 2012:944). The pattern contains three types of position, namely long (-), short (u) and *anceps* (x). The *anceps* can be either long or short (Parker 2012:943). The iambic trimeter became the standard spoken verse of drama in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The trochaic tetrameter was used sometimes in tragedy by Aeschylus and Euripides (Parker 2012:944).

frequently seen to be the theme of the birth of Dionysos and was also seen as his characteristic hymn. Zimmermann (2012:469) adds to this point by saying that the dithyramb, or in other words a choral song, was a song sung in honour of Dionysus. The details surrounding the process are undefined; however, it would appear to be certain that Greek tragedy as well as comedy emerged in a ritual context from the choral songs that were performed for Dionysos (Larson 2007:126). There are similarities between the tragedies, and it is these similarities that allow for a different type of definition, namely by content. A tragedy was a drama that was formulated on traditional legends, and it was set in a past that was remote for the ancient Athenian audience. However, major events that took place in history or even recent history could also be used as a basis for the tragedies (Scodel 2011:3). Debnar (2005:5) continues by giving a different definition for “history” that is applicable to ancient Greece, namely the fact that “Historians, as well as tragic poets, compose narratives” and “Nonetheless, as products of the same culture as tragedies, ancient historical narratives are likely to ‘reflect its categories and concerns, whether psychological, social, or political’”.

Tragedy was a specific kind of drama. There were actors involved in the plays that were performed, and in Athens there were no more than three actors that were part of the tragedy. Along with the actors, there was also a chorus that consisted of twelve members and later consisting of fifteen members. They performed with song and dance and were assisted by a person who played the *aulos*, which is a reeded wind instrument (Scodel 2011:3). The fact that the choruses not only sang but also danced is greatly important to understand the tragedy as both a form of art and in connection with the festivals and the community with which it associates (Easterling 2003:156). The formation of tragedies only has one purpose, which is to satisfy the crowd of spectators without being worried whether it would be morally useful or not (Munteanu 2012:58). Tragedies can also be seen as a type of flattery and as a form of well-liked rhetoric (Munteanu 2012:59). By adding to the point of well-liked rhetoric, it is believed that Greek tragedy is fundamentally a drama of words, where the characters enter the stage, speak to one another and then leave the stage (Burian 2003:199). Debnar concludes that there are two broad categories of tragedies. The first category is where the “poet alludes directly to fifth-century events or developments but moves them back into the mythological past”, and with regards to the second category, tragedies in this category “generally avoid overt references to fifth-century events or figures; paradoxically, they also draw the mythological past into the present” (Debnar 2005:5). It would appear that the majority of plays that fall into the second category were written by Euripides (Debnar 2005:5). Munteanu states that the use of myths

and imagery in epics and tragedies are used in order to inspire some sort of emotion that “is no less despicable than ordinary fear.” By adding these sorts of myths and imagery to the epics and tragedies, it presents a sombre picture of immoral gods, which is based on an unknowledgeable and also an un-philosophical perspective of the world (Munteanu 2012:55). However, according to Hall (2003:98), the mythical legacy that the tragedians took over from the poets of the archaic epics as well as the lyrics, is based on the anguish of the kings. The task that the tragedians took upon themselves was to re-explain these myths for more ‘modern’ purposes and also to use the control of the past to honour and to justify the present (Hall 2003:98).

There are more defining characteristics of tragedy, for instance the fact that the actors were noble, even if they were disguised as beggars or those who were enslaved. The chorus could indulge the audience by revealing secrets but could not take part in the action or stop an act of violence. Therefore, the chorus were often old men, women or slaves (Scodel 2011:5). Although there are many important factors regarding how the tragedy is performed, styled and even structured, these factors are necessary to make a tragedy unique and distinct from a comedy, the delivery of an epic or any other kind of performance (Scodel 2011:5).

According to Scodel (2011:7), tragedy is hard to disconnect from “the tragic”, namely the fact that Greek tragedy is seen as the starting point of a long tradition, and that it is natural to find similarities within this long tradition. Further stated by Scodel (2011:7), the following explains the themes that is dealt by the tragic tradition: “The entire tragic tradition, from Greek tragedy onward, concerns itself with some core issues: the vulnerability of human life; the value of facing the limits of our control with courage; and the powerful, sometimes inescapable, effects our decisions”. By looking at these core issues that are part of the Greek tragedy and the rest of the tragic tradition, it is remarked that these issues are relatable with issues of our present time and are not considered to be seen as foreign ideas. However, tragedy cannot be used as a record of the real historical life in Athens (Hall 2003:99).

### **3. Ancient Roman Tragedies**

The Greek-style tragedies first appeared in Rome in the middle – of the third century BCE (Manuwald 2011:15). This is due to the influence of Hellenisation where the Hellenic culture changed and became less ‘Greek’ and spread over large areas (Manuwald 2011:16). The first performance of a Latin tragedy was by Varro and T. Pomponius Atticus in 240 BCE at the *ludi*

*Romani*<sup>22</sup>. These tragedies that were presented in Rome were about Greek myths and mostly modified from the classical Greek tragedies. The early poets found in Rome were of non-Roman origin and had a low social status. Meanwhile, the tragedies from the Roman Republic survive only in fragments (Jocelyn & Manuwald 2012:1498). The first playwrights in Rome were Greeks or half-Greeks (Manuwald 2011:18). According to Goldberg, the history of Roman tragedy rests on a paradox (1996: 265). Roman drama was considered to be one of the first literary genres that was founded in Rome, for it came into existence due to Rome's contact with other cultures (Manuwald 2011:1). Nevertheless, Rome was also open and willing to adopt the Greek culture into their own (Manuwald 2011:35).

With regards to serious drama, these types of dramas revolved around the themes of Roman legends and history from the third century onwards, which was expanded from the dramatic structure that was created by combining Attic script with the local theatrical tradition. This new creation of the Roman dramatic genre was called the *fabula praetexta*<sup>23</sup> (Jocelyn & Manuwald 2012:1498). The most common form of serious Roman drama was called the *tragoedia* also known as the *fabula crepidata*, which indicates Roman tragedies in the Greek style. In other words, these dramas were written on sections of the Greek myth in an elevated style<sup>24</sup> (Manuwald 2011:133). The only texts from the Imperial period that survived were those by L. Annaeus Seneca. Tragedy was not one of the poetic genres that was tried in late antiquity (Jocelyn & Manuwald 2012:1498). The unfortunate matter of Roman tragedies is that none have survived, except for the ten plays written by Seneca. However, it does contain information regarding the "production history" (Goldberg 1996:265). The Republican tragedy was also known for the fact that it had an argumentative quality (Goldberg 1996:274).

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<sup>22</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as "The Roman Play". *Ludus*.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ludi&la=la#Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=damnatio-contents/Romani>.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=Romani&la=la#Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=damnatio-contents>

<sup>23</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as "Bordered drama/fable/story". *Fabula*.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=fabula&la=la#Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=damnatio-contents/Praetexta>.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=praetexta&la=la#Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=damnatio-contents>

<sup>24</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translation for *tragoedia* is "a tragedy".  
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=tragoedia&la=la> / Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translation for *fabula crepidata* is "A kind of Graeco-Roman tragedy".  
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=crepidatus&la=la#lexicon>



From the first century BCE onwards, the most popular forms of theatrical entertainment were mimes and pantomimes. Mimes sang, danced, and acted without using a mask, whereas pantomimes wore masks, danced and acted, but there was no singing involved. Women were allowed to take part and perform in mimes and pantomimes (Aldrete 2004:138). With the rise of mimes, pantomimes and other public spectacles that were gaining popularity, tragedies began to lose their popularity and audience (Goldberg 1996:272). The difference between mimes and pantomimes is based on the subject matter. Mimes tend to be more “realistic, comic, and even vulgar and could deal with any topic”, and the opposite was true of pantomimes, who “resembled ballet productions of themes and stories from myth and evolved into impressive spectacles full of elaborate staging, costumes, and special effects” (Aldrete 2004:138).

The soloist filled the stage with the movements he performed and filled the theatre with his voice as he sang. As Carcopino (2003:226) stated, the soloist was “skilled in personifying every human type, in representing every human situation”. He continued by saying that the pantomimes were more aimed at trying to catch the audience’s eye and their senses rather than touching their hearts or playing on their emotions. The pantomime plays were either stark tragedies or sensual productions (Carcopino 2003:228). With regards to the mimes, it is a word that was used to indicate both a type of show as well as the actor that plays in the show. Mimes were a charade based as close as possible on real life, and the actors did not wear a mask (Carcopino 2003:229). Although mimes and pantomimes were popular during the first century BCE, it would appear that as early as 160 BCE the Romans left the theatre where plays were performed for the gladiatorial arena and it grew quite popular (Carcopino 2003:231).

#### **4. Ancient Roman Theatre**

According to Aldrete (2004:138), theatre, music and dance were generally combined as “one synthetic experience” rather than being performed as independent forms of art. As stated by Jocelyn and Manuwald (2012:1498), there was probably not enough space in front of the stage platform in the Roman theatres for intricate choral dancing, thus all the action of the plays happened on the stage. From the third century BCE onwards, the plays that were performed were based on the model of Greek theatre with the usage of masks as well as only male actors that would play the female roles as well (Aldrete 2004:138). Carcopino says that the *cantica*<sup>25</sup> of the plays sometimes evoke certain emotions in the audience, depending on the content of

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<sup>25</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Song/ Passage in a comedy chanted or sung”. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=cantica&la=la#Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=damnatio-contents>



the play (2003:225). He continued further by saying that these songs were derived from Greek tragedy. Carcopino (2003: 225) presents the birth of Roman drama as well as Roman opera in the following way,

Born of the incomparable Greek tragedy, the Roman drama lay shattered to fragments amid the marble of scenic decoration. But as these operatic airs rose above the ruin of great tragedy, the pure intoxication which the ancient masterpieces had inspired once again touched the listening masses.

Until nearly the end of the Republican period, theatres were temporary structures (Manuwald 2011:55). There were various attempts to construct permanent theatres in Rome throughout the second century BCE, but these attempts failed. This was during the most productive period of the Republican drama (Manuwald 2011:57). An important difference between the ancient Greek theatres and the Roman theatres was the fact that the Greek theatres were built on a natural hill for the rising auditorium, whereas the Roman theatres used compact, artificial and free-standing blocks on flat surfaces in order to have the same effect of a rising auditorium (Manuwald 2011:66). The first permanent amphitheatre was built in 29 BCE in the south of Campus Martius; however, it was destroyed by the great fire of 64 CE (Carcopino 2003:233). The first stone theatre that was built was constructed in the southern Campus Martius by Pompey the Great in 55 BCE. During the following 50 years, the theatre was enlarged with two more theatres, namely the Theatre of Balbus and the Theatre of Marcellus (Aldrete 2004:138). Pompey emphasised the fact that he originally built a Temple of Venus and that the steps could be used as seats in order to watch performances (Manuwald 2001:62). The plays that were performed in the theatre that Pompey built were in both Greek and Latin (Goldberg 1996:266). With the opening of the Flavian Amphitheatre in 80 CE, the emperor Titus decided to host the most “extravagant spectacles” that lasted for at least a hundred days (Kyle 2001:34). This Flavian Amphitheatre has survived both earthquakes and Renaissance plunderers since its construction in 80 CE (Carcopino 2003:233).

## **5. Death and punishment in Ancient Greece**

The beginning of Greek law is hard to determine. However, there is one view that suggests that an unwritten rule should be regarded as the law if the community or even the ruler has approved this rule and also imposed it in order to determine the punishment for offences, namely murder, theft and so forth (McDowell 2012:802). The law written for any specific offence had a specific action in the form of punishment that fitted the form of the offence. There were different forms

of offence, and they could be categorised as either private actions or public actions. An example would be if it was a private action, then the damages or compensation would be given to the prosecutor. However, if it was a public action, then a penalty or a fine would be paid to the state (McDowell 2012:803). With regard to murder, these types of cases would be different, for instance if someone was killed, that person's relatives were required to prosecute the killer (McDowell 2012:804). When murder was committed, it was more often due to stabbing rather than poisoning (Touwaide 2019:133).

Flogging was seen as a normal form of punishment for slaves under the Athenian democracy; however, it was not considered suitable for free men. Whips, which were used for flogging, were associated with the tyrants (Lintott 2012:1241). Saunders presents a definition for punishment, namely the fact that it is seen as a suffering which is inflicted on the wrongdoer in exchange for the suffering he had caused others (2012:1241). Saunders mentions four different forms of punishment for the wrongdoers, namely severe penalties, surrogate punishers, the belief in the supernatural surrogate punishers and finally a certain fascination (2012:1242). The severe penalties include the seizure of property, receiving heavy fines, exile or banishment and finally, there was also the possibility of death (Saunders 2012:1242). The surrogate punishers refers to a third party who is innocent; however, they are connected to the offender in a way. The belief in the supernatural surrogate punishers refers to the gods or the Erinyes and so forth who deliver punishment to those who escape human justice. And finally, the certain fascination is to do with the ones who specify the crime in a manner that is either satisfyingly neat or amusing (Saunders 2012:1242).

The assumption of equality did not extend all the way into the area of hostility, for there was no 'eye for an eye' type of policy. Rather it was more of a 'head for an eye' type of policy. Thus, if the hero was injured, provoked or even offended, then he had the opportunity to take revenge on the offender (Highet 2012:1258). According to Mendoza (2022:7), the ancient Greeks viewed decapitation as something which was practised by barbarians and those who they deemed to be completely uncivilised. The Greeks made use of social justice, and some examples of social justice were house-razing and stoning (Forsdyke 2008:28). Forsdyke (2008:38) states further that stoning as a form of execution required a large crowd in order to be effective, and it was also regarded as a very controlled form of social justice. Furthermore, rulers who showed inadequate consideration for the common good would find themselves being stoned by the people (Forsdyke 2008:40). According to Rosivach (1987:233), there is not much information regarding the tradition of stoning in Athens or elsewhere in Greece

before the fifth century. Furthermore, there is some evidence that Athenians from the fourth and fifth centuries found stoning repulsive (Rosivach 1987:236). Nonetheless, it is said that stoning was used as a form of punishment for those who had caused harm to the entire community (Rosivach 1987:233). Athens had a form of stoning that took place every year. This was part of a sort of remedy that would cleanse the entire community which involved scapegoats. The city drove out the scapegoats, and a form of stoning took place when two of the least significant citizens of the city were driven out of the city after the people had finished “decking” them with dried figs (Allen 2000:85). This cleansing ritual took place during a festival, which was also on the last day of the Athenian year. Allen (2000:85) remarked on this practice by saying the following,

The *pharmakoi* were human remedies for the city’s anger at itself. More important, the citizens’ participation in the stoning reminded them, at the beginning and end of every year, that all citizens were mutually implicated in the processes of violence that were involved in curing the problems of wrongdoing, passion, and punishment that arose in the community.

Regarding the quoted section above, the *pharmakoi* is someone who is sacrificed or executed in order to purify or atone for the wrongdoings of others <sup>26</sup>. However, according to Allen, *pharmakon* could also refer to not only ‘remedy’ but also to ‘poison’ (2000:85). It would appear that the only way the city was sure that their anger was ‘removed’ was if someone was sacrificed. The stoning aspect also appears to remind the citizens that they are part of the violence, and the stoning was also a method of getting rid of the violence that took place during the year. If the community sees someone committing a wrongdoing, the stoning mob will contain the wrongdoer at the centre of the community and they had the power to even change, and alter the behaviour of the hero in the community (Allen 2000:206). Thus, it would appear that the stoning mob held great power in the community, for not only did they punish the wrongdoer, but they even had the power to better the hero in the community. Military stoning and death by sword never took place after a trial, but only took place at the order of a military officer or from the mass action of the stoning mob (Allen 2000:214). Eidinow (2016:110) refers to Pindar, who describes what it feels like to be the receiver of *phthonos*, which is translated as jealousy and envy. The imagery that Pindar used is that it feels like being struck with a rough stone, in other words being stoned. The stoning aspect of this imagery, as well as the ideas of

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<sup>26</sup> Definition according to LSJ. Φαρμακός.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=farmakoi%2F&la=greek#lexicon>

retribution, would suggest that from within the community there would be no official interference (Eidinow 2016:110).

According to Eidinow (2016:237), it is difficult to pinpoint the origins of binding metaphors; however, it would appear that they might originate from the area of civic punishment. The most common word for binding in Athens appears to have been built around the words of binding, namely *-deo* and *katadeo*. Consecutively, both these words refer to being physically tied up and thus refers to being attached to something, detained or even sent to prison (Eidinow 2016:237). There are binding spells that target specific parts of the body. The Greeks were not specific with their terms and descriptions for the different forms of physical binding as civic punishments. It is not easy to ascertain which device or approach is referred to in the sources. There are a few devices mentioned, which are: *kuphon* ('pillory'), *kloios* (a wooden collar that criminals wore), *podokakke* ('stocks'), *tumpanon*<sup>27</sup> (which is defined as the name of an instrument of torture or execution; also defined as 'cudgel') (Eidinow 2016:238). The last term mentioned, which also had the definition of 'cudgel', could also refer to a beating that takes place during the civic punishment or execution process. The most common term that was used was *xulon* (Eidinow 2016:238). However, the spelling used by Eidinow presents a different definition than the correct spelling, which is ξύλον. According to LSJ, the translation for ξύλον is 'wood' or 'piece of wood, beam.'<sup>28</sup> However, with regards to 'an instrument of punishment,' it also means 'wooden collar', 'stocks', 'gallows' or 'stake on which criminals were impaled'. If it was combined with another word, such as πεντεσύριγγον ξύλον, then it would refer to the combination of both a wooden collar and stocks with holes for the neck, arms, and legs (Eidinow 2016:238). During the fifth and fourth centuries, capital punishment was used by the Athenians in both the city and during the wars. In the city, there were two methods of capital punishment used, namely hemlock and *apotumpanismos* (Allen 2000:213). According to the LSJ, *apotumpanismos* is defined as crucifixion<sup>29</sup>. Eidinow (2016:241) adds to this by saying that it was first considered to mean someone being clubbed to death. However, it has been reimagined by modern scholars to be a form of crucifixion, for the discovery of a grave

<sup>27</sup> Definition according to LSJ. Τύπανον.

[http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=tu%2Fmpanon&la=greek&can=tu%2Fmpanon0&prior=o\(#lexicon](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=tu%2Fmpanon&la=greek&can=tu%2Fmpanon0&prior=o(#lexicon)

<sup>28</sup> Definition according to LSJ. Ξύλον

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=%CE%BE%CF%8D%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%BD&la=greek#lexicon>

<sup>29</sup> Definition according to LSJ. ἀποτυμpanισμός.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=apotumpanismos+&la=greek#lexicon>

consisting out of bodies wearing an iron collar along with clamps on the hands and feet attests to this (Eidinow 2016:241). Furthermore, *apotumpanismos* was also used during the war, along with death by sword and stoning. Evidence of stoning is found in Xenophon's *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*, but there is also further evidence of people's throats being cut for committing any wrongdoings (Allen 2000:231).

## **6. Death and Punishment in Ancient Rome**

One of the many arguments made by Cicero is that there is a natural instinct of man to take vengeance in order to ensure his own as well as his family's survival (Lintott 2012:1241). Coleman (1990:45-46) states that the most primitive form of retribution is regarded to be the saying "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". He continues by saying that this revengeful aim was then taken over by the state as they evolve their structure of punishment. Furthermore, Seneca disclosed the fact that the retaliation and revenge were the main factors that drove the emperors in their punishments of the crimes (Coleman 1990:46). Criminal law from both Greece and Rome prohibits private revenge (Lintott 2012:1241). Looking at the oldest period of criminal law, found close together with the idea of private revenge, one also finds the custom of settlements between the offender and the offended (Berger, Nicholas & Lintott 2012:809). Lintott points out further that revenge, recompense and the insistence of civic authority are considered to be the main themes of the Greek and Roman custom of punishment (2012:1241).

Punishments imposed on criminals were different based on the status that was assigned to them. Upper-class citizens were punished in terms of a loss of status, exiled, or in extreme cases, executed in private settings. However, lower-class people were more exposed to beatings and the humiliation of being executed in public in front of an audience. Slaves, on the other hand, could suffer a wide range of cruel tortures and forms of execution (Aldrete 2004:104-105). The status of the condemned plays a big role in determining their punishment, and the punishment of slaves was much harsher than that of the freemen (Lintott 2012:1241). Apuleius mentioned what the punishments would be for thieves in his *Golden Ass*, or the *Metamorphosis* as this Latin novel is also known. The thieves would suffer great punishments; not only the thieves, but also any other person who was convicted of a crime they committed. In order to ensure that others will not follow the same path, the hope was that the fear of the extreme punishment would stop them from committing any crimes. Some of these punishments included severed hands, being sent to the mines or to the gladiatorial schools, lashings, beheadings, death by wild animals, hanging and also crucifixion (Knapp 2011:38).

Flogging was mostly used on citizens who disobeyed the magistrates (Lintott 2012:1241). There was no form of a prison system in Rome and the only form of prison was a single room or cell where people were kept until they could be executed. The customary punishments that were used were flogging, fines, decapitation, crucifixion or burning. With regards to burning, it was used for people who committed treachery and arson (Aldrete 2004:105). Long-term imprisonment by the community was not common either Greek cities or the Roman republic. However, a different approach to long-term imprisonment was selling delinquents into chattel-slavery or handing them over to the person that they managed to offend and making them their slaves. This was the fate of thieves under the Roman republic. Under the Principate, the condemned were sent to gladiatorial schools, mines or public works (Lintott 2012:1241). The condemned not only suffered physically but were also humiliated which was caused by the mental and emotional suffering (Coleman 1990:46).

As with most of the traditions and rituals of the ancient Romans, it would appear that they find their origins in religion. The killing of people seems to have also found its origin in religion. According to Kyle (2001:40), the earliest standardised ritualised killings in Rome did not have their origins in primitive traditions or in Christian rhetoric, but were seen to be Sacro-legal executions. As the societies became more intricate, the treatment of community members that did not follow the system or rules of the community became a greater problem. Within smaller groups, disobedient or/and dangerous members could be driven out; however, larger communities' problematic members were publicly punished in order to show the power that the state has to comfort those who stay obedient to the state, and finally to dissuade those who may be seen as potentially disobedient (Kyle 2001:40). Kyle (2001:40) further asserts that "Long before the first *munus*<sup>30</sup> in 264, ritual killings as executions, both punitive and sacral, were entrenched in law and ritual. Even official executions retain sacral overtones, but when states become autocracies and empires, demonstrations of state power became even more mandatory and spectacular". According to Carcopino, the exact reason as to why the Romans made human sacrifice, or in other words the *munus*, a festival that was celebrated throughout the city quite enthusiastically, or even the preference of seeing men or armed men get killed for entertainment, is inexplicable (2003:231). Instead of banishing those who became disobedient to the state, whose disobedience was seen as resistance the state, the state took executions further and performed more executions in order to keep control over the people of

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<sup>30</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as "Tribute/Offering".  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=munus&la=la#lexicon>

the state. The state had to show their power and control to the people and dispose of those who might cause trouble and show the people that the state is not that powerful as they claim to be. Thus, the state tried to use fear to keep the people in line and prevent further disruptions. The condemned could also escape execution by voluntary exile; however, if they were to return, they would be executed, and their property would also be confiscated (Lintott 2012:1241).

In Rome, it became normalised to kill people and animals violently as well as publicly in different types of ‘games’ or ‘shows’ (Kyle 2001:34). Kyle (2001: 34) states further that these games or shows, or in other words entertainments, over time became more complicated as well as more intricate, “but danger and death were not stylized and reduced, as in modern violent sports, but intensified and actualized”. In the end, death in the most violent manners and methods became the most enjoyable form of entertainment in Rome. There was an annual sacrifice of dogs, according to Pliny the Elder, where the dogs are crucified while still being alive and then carried about in a procession (Kyle 2001: 42). Lintott (2012: 1241) adds to this point regarding execution as part of the entertainment for Rome by using the criminals to fight in the gladiatorial fights or to use them to fight against wild animals or even to use them in plays and/or dramas where they play a mythological character that suffers a dramatic death that becomes real.

Since the founding of Rome, animals have been publicly killed in the form of sacrifices, and people were killed publicly in the form of executions that were important to the security of the city in view of the fact that it is an ordered community and a consecrated population. However, gradually the categories of sacrifice, executions, hunting, and ritual killings started to become obscure, “especially as they increasingly overlapped in what might be called the ‘conglomerate’ or multi-dimensional spectacles of the first century BC” (Kyle 2001:35). It would appear that with all these ‘games’ that were held in Rome that involved the killing of humans and animals, there seemed to no longer be any division between killing for the pleasure of the audience, executing criminals or killing for rituals for the gods. In the year 167 BCE, Lucius Aemilius Paullus had non-Roman deserters crushed to death by elephants, and in the year 146 BCE Scipio Africanus Minor crucified Roman deserters and beheaded Latin deserters at Carthage, and also threw non-Roman deserters as well as runaway slaves to wild animals at public shows that were held in Rome (Kyle 2001:49). However, Seneca asserted that the law achieved three aims in the act of punishing of offenders, namely rectification, discouragement, and redevelopment of the security of the state by means of removing the criminal from society (Coleman 1990:48). The rectification part of the three aims is to convince the criminal that they



should behave in a manner that is socially accepted as well as a prevention method to stop other criminals from committing the same offence. With regards to the discouragement aim, this aim is to try and dissuade potential criminals from pursuing a life of crime (Coleman 1990:48). In order for the discouragement aim to be successful, the punishment should induce feelings of horror and revulsion and there is no doubt that the audiences in the amphitheatres experienced these types of feelings. However, a gap was created between the “spectacle and the spectator”, where the ruling emotion among the audience became pleasure rather than revulsion (Coleman 1990:49).

With the regulation of conglomerate spectacles, there was also a diversification on ritualised public executions of criminals as well as Christians; however, Rome did not execute everyone in the same way (Kyle 2001:52-53). Under the late empire criminal legislation, the law was more focused on penalties rather than the doctrinal treatment of the offences. Berger, Nicholas and Lintott (2012:809) expand further on this point with the following, “The punishableness of some delicts varied under the influence of political or religious points of view; the creation of new categories of crimes in this long period is restricted to abduction and offences against the Christian religion after its recognition by the state. The profession of Christianity had at one time been prosecuted as *crimen maiestatis*<sup>31</sup>”. By looking at this extract of the punishments, it would appear that the criminal law under the late empire was more focused on how they would inflict penalties on the offenders rather than how criminal law should be handled. Furthermore, the manner in which the offenders were punished was also based on political and religious standpoints. Moreover, evidently the crimes were recreated and adapted so that it would fit Christianity, since Christians were executed on the accusation of high treason. The emergence of Christianity caused changes to be made to the methods of punishments; however, it did not reduce the severity of the punishments (Berger, Nicholas & Lintott 2012:811).

Kyle (2001:102) sets out with an explanation for the executions and how they became a form of a spectacle with the following quote,

Ritualized executions were punitive spectacles. Doomed by their crimes or class, their religion or resistance to Rome, most victims had virtually no hope of avoiding death – or its aftermath. Such men – and women – were officially condemned, brutally killed, and

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<sup>31</sup> Definition according to LSJ. Translated as “High treason”. *Crimen*.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=crimen&la=la#lexicon> / *Maeiestatis*.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=maiestatis&la=la#lexicon>



thoroughly damned, all with legal, popular, and religious sanction. Rome was seeking spectacle resources for diversions, but it was also seeking expiation and scapegoats for imperial problems. It was trying to cleanse itself of criminal and blasphemous miasma. The acceptability of judicial violence was aided by, and ultimately outlived, Roman blood sports. Public brutality continued after Rome in sacro-legal punishments – where it began.

By looking at the extract by Kyle, it would appear that Rome no longer persecuted and executed criminals based on their crimes, but rather on a whim. Some victims were executed because of their religion, which one would assume means that they no longer followed the Roman religion or worshipped the emperor, but rather followed a different religion, for instance Christianity. Another reason as to why people was executed were because they showed resistance to Rome, where propaganda and the city's dogma no longer applied to them or they started to question certain practices or laws of the city. Resistance to the city was seen as a bad thing to the leaders, for it meant that they no longer held sway over the citizens. Rome also turned public executions into public entertainment. Where public executions were used to strike fear into the citizens, it now provided them with entertainment. Thus, Rome started to present the executions in the form of a spectacle in order to regain the people's trust and to also get rid of anyone who posed a threat to the system. The term 'execution' became synonymous with 'spectacle' or 'entertainment.' The idea of public execution leads one to think about the context of gallows that were built along the road or outside the city wall. However, according to Coleman (1990: 49) the critical significance of the Roman fatal charades is the fact that it was an endorsement of "custom-built public auditoria" that were used as venues for the criminals to be condemned based on their capital charges. The basic requirements for such a venue were that there should be someone with administrative authority to organise the event, the right venue that has the suitable facilities needed, a supply of criminals that will be displayed, and finally, an approving audience (Coleman 1990: 49-50).

Denial of burial was seen as a further form of humiliation to those who were executed. Not only were they executed in perhaps the most humiliating way, but now they were denied burial and left to the wild animals, dogs, and birds of prey. According to Roman law, criminals were allowed to be buried if they were executed *capite*<sup>32</sup>, in other words by capital punishment; however, traitors were the exception to the law (Kyle 2001:133). It was also not permitted to

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<sup>32</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as "By head/By capital (punishment)".  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=capite&la=la#lexicon>

mourn traitors and was seen as illegal. With regards to the Roman political life, homicide, denial of burial and suicide were not considered to be forbidden, for the emperors always knew how to either honour the dead or to insult it (Kyle 2001:133). The denial of burial was also seen as a symbolic enhancement of legal criticism into ritual damnation. In other words, “[...] not a Christian Hell with divine judgement but a humanly induced, forlorn disquietude for the offender’s spirit” (Kyle 2001:133). To be buried is a way for a criminal or a victim to keep a bit of humility, despite being executed in the most brutal and humiliating way. However, knowing that after death one will be denied burial must have been a crushing moment, not only for the victim but also for the family, for the denial of burial not only affects the victim, but also the family and can be seen as a method of bringing the victim’s shame onto the family and letting them live with it for the rest of their lives. According to Kyle (2001:133), the denial of burial, as well as the abuse of the corpse after death was seen as a form of intense insult that is caused by ingrained emotions of hate, fear, and disgust.

Denial of burial can also be seen as a form of destroying one’s memory by subjecting the corpse to further humiliation. This act of removing one’s memory was called *damnatio memoriae*. According to Varner (2004: 1), there were important expressions of political dominance as well as prestige, and thus imperial portraits were spread throughout every aspect of Roman society. There were various depictions of the emperor and his family being displayed, quite noticeably in sacred, domestic and civic spaces throughout the empire, and these depictions were well planned and carefully dispersed in order to reach multiple audiences. However, these imperial depictions were never set nor unchanging, for if it happened that an emperor was overthrown, these images or depictions of him were steadily mutilated or even physically altered into the depictions of other emperors (Varner 2004:1). The state decided who should be regarded as enemies of the state and that they should be condemned. Once the enemies were dead, there were measures in place that would erase their memory and erase them from history (Baldson & Levick, 2012:411). This process of mutilation and physical alteration of images is called *damnatio memoriae* and this process was not only very popular and well-known by all, but was also the first and most extensive example of the denial of these artistic monuments that were used for political as well as ideological reasons, which has also inevitably changed the material record of Roman culture (Varner 2004:1).

Varner continues by saying that the term *damnatio memoriae*, which means literally the damnation of the memory, or the condemnation of the memory is, in fact, a modern term

(2004:2). However, this term correctly describes the preoccupation the Romans had with the concepts that deal with memory and also with fame (Varner 2004:2).

Poisonings were just as common in Rome as in other parts of the ancient world (Touwaide 2019:134). However, even though many poisonings were recorded in ancient Rome, the exact nature of poisons or poisons that were used is not known (Cilliers & Retief 2019:235). The first recorded case of poisoning found in Rome can be found in 331 BCE (Cilliers & Retief 2019:236). There are even cases of murder by poison that took place in the imperial palace, as in the case of Claudius (Touwaide 2019:134). Claudius' death was caused by poisons mixed with mushrooms, as he was quite fond of eating mushrooms. The death of Claudius was orchestrated by his wife, Agrippina, as well as another woman, Locusta. Locusta was from Gaul and had mastered the art of poisons (Touwaide 2019:135). The death of Claudius was either due to poisonous mushrooms or poisoned mushrooms (Cilliers & Retief 2019:235). Vegetable poisons were more well-known and most frequently used (Cilliers & Retief 2019:232). The precise nature of the poisons that were used for murder, whether prepared by an expert, for instance someone like Locusta, or prepared by less qualified assassins, is seldom known (Touwaide 2019:135). Nero made use of Locusta's services as well, and poisonings among the aristocracy increased during the reign of Nero. Locusta tested her poisons on animals and on convicted criminals (Cilliers & Retief 2019:239). There is the possibility that the nature of the poisons is unknown in many cases, which might be due to the poison having a special "off-limits status" in the ancient world (Touwaide 2019:135). The ancients distinguished between three kinds of poisons, namely severe poisons that killed very quickly, chronic poisons that caused physical decline, and chronic poisons that caused mental decline (Cilliers & Retief 2019:234). Long before Locusta appeared as the master poisoner, the predecessor of the individual at the border of society who was a user of poisons was the legendary Medea. Medea used her singular talents to manipulate poisons in different ways (Touwaide 2019:135). The story of Medea portrays poisoning out of jealousy as the normal act of irrational people. Although there are cases of poisoning found in written documents, recurrence should not be exaggerated. The same thing can most likely be said regarding executions (Touwaide 2019:136). The charge of poisoning was frequently made against women, and the cases usually involved a woman from a low social status (Höbenreich & Rizzelli 2019:291).

### **6.1. Crucifixion**

Crucifixion was only used for people who practised incest, committed treason and for slaves that revolted, which was one of the customary forms of punishment (Aldrete 2004:105).

Criminals of low status and guilty of more than one crime, Rome punished them with the most aggravated or ultimate form of punishments, which was called *summa supplicia*<sup>33</sup>. These types of punishments included being exposed to wild animals, burned alive and crucifixion (Kyle 2001:53). In order to install fear in the citizens and the slaves, the state dispensed this gruesome form of punishments, especially on the ‘criminal’ slaves, the magisterial judgements were quite routine with dealing out the punishment of crucifixion, burning alive or torn apart by wild animals (Knapp 2011:119). Although it would appear that crucifixion was the usual form of punishment that was used for the slaves (Coleman 1990:53). Quite the opposite to popular belief is the fact that most of the dead victims found in the arena are not true gladiators, in other words those who went to the gladiator school, but they are rather the ill-fated convicts, or also known as *noxii*<sup>34</sup>, both men and women are sentenced to death by means of execution, crucifixion, fire or wild animals (Kyle 2001:91).

It is believed that the crucifixion as a method of execution was used earlier in the Near East and that this method was probably invented in Persia (Kyle 2001: 53). According to Watson and Lintott (2012: 396), they believe that the method of crucifixion was probably borrowed from Carthage. The method used as a Roman penalty for the first time was testified in the Punic Wars (Watson & Lintott 2012: 396). However, it was taken over by Rome and this execution method seemed to have developed from a form of punishment to a form of execution. It would appear that when crucifixion was used as a form of punishment, the person being convicted had to carry the cross in the public, bound to the cross and also whipped. With regards to the form of execution, the person being executed was attached to the cross and suspended (Kyle 2001: 53). Crucifixion as a form of execution appeared to have consisted of a few steps that occurred before the person found themselves on the cross. These steps are explained in the following quote that describes what happens to the person from being found guilty of their crimes and finding themselves on the cross,

Usually this form of execution was authorized by the Roman court; the victim was stripped and scourged; a horizontal beam was placed on his shoulders; and he was

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<sup>33</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Greatest punishment/Torture”. *Summa*. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=summa&la=la#lexicon> / *Supplicia*. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=supplicia&la=la#lexicon>

<sup>34</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Criminals”. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=noxii&la=la#lexicon>

marched to the execution site, usually outside the city walls, where a vertical stake was set in the ground and the man was bound or nailed to the cross (Kyle 2001:53).

By looking at this quote above, the methods of being executed on the cross would appear quite intense as well as a bit humiliating, for the victim have to walk in the public either nude or nearly nude and was also whipped. The execution site, even though it is outside the city walls, would still attract a crowd, especially since the person has to walk through the city while carrying the crossbeam, or a *patibulum*<sup>35</sup>, until they reached the site. According to Watson and Lintott (2012:396), the condemned was first lashed and then had to carry the crossbeam to the execution site where he was then stripped and fastened to the crossbeam with either nails or with cord. Cook asserts that if the condemned had to carry the *patibulum* to the site, the *crux*, or in other words the vertical beam, was already erected at the site (2019:423). He also mentions that in other texts there are references that the entire cross was already prepared and it is not mentioned that the condemned had to carry the *patibulum* (Cook 2019:423). The beam was then drawn up by using ropes until the feet no longer touched the ground. Occasionally there was a form of support for the body in the form of a ledge, or in other words a *sedile*<sup>36</sup>, but there is barely any form of evidence of a *suppedaneum* or a footrest. However, the feet were sometimes nailed or tied to the cross (Watson & Lintott 2012:396). There are accounts of a wooden beam being carried or a yoke, but it was not clear what was being carried and why. Additionally, there is no evidence found in the literature that a seat, or *sedile*, was involved (Samuelsson 2013:295). Thus, in other words, a crucifixion does not necessarily include a crossbeam. While crucifixion was normally used to execute criminal slaves, it was also quite often used against rebellious Jews and Christians. Samuelsson (2013:270) states that a “crucifixion was a suspension, a completed or intended execution on a pole, with or without a crossbeam, and it ended in an extended death struggle”. Furthermore, he argues that the connotations people have regarding crucifixion come from Calvary (Samuelsson 2013:270). He also mentioned that Diodorus Siculus wrote about a crucifixion as a form of ante-mortem suspension. Four other texts were studied, and two texts mentioned a victim, either living or dead, nailed while being suspended and the other two texts implied that the victims were alive while being suspended (Samuelsson 2013:272). Evidence relating to the shape of the cross, or

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<sup>35</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Fork-shaped yoke/Gibbet”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=patibulum&la=la#lexicon>

<sup>36</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Seat”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=sedile&la=la#lexicon>

σταυρος, are unsupported. The text which is supposed to support the idea that the cross should be either a T-shaped cross or a regular cross only mention that the σταυρος resembled the mast of a ship (Samuelsson 2013:277). It is also unclear what the victim had to carry to the execution site and whether it was a cross or an execution tool (Samuelsson 2013:277-278). The only thing that can be derived from the literary evidence is that the victim had to carry an unspecified torture device that was intended for punishment and not thereafter merged with the suspension tool (Samuelsson 2013:278).

Moreover, for cautionary effect, the crucifixions were also held at well-travelled public roadways, which was also a striking difference to the hallowed burials of good citizens that were buried nearby (Kyle 2001:53). Cornelius Tacitus used a phrase *novissima exempla* in his *Annales*, which translated means “most recent model or example,” as well as the modern insight that Nero did not invent the execution methods, such as the crucifixion and fire, that he used for the Christians (Kyle 2001: 245).

Tacitus painted Nero as a bad emperor in his *Annales*<sup>37</sup>, but also showed that the Christians were indeed guilty and thus deserved their punishments. In order to explain the fire that nearly destroyed Rome, Nero decided that there had to be culprits for this act of destruction, and he found the culprits. The culprits that he found was a group of people who were deeply attested by the Romans for their “shameful offenses” and this group of people were called Christians [Tac.*Ann.*15.44]. The punishments that were inflicted upon the Christians are explained further by Tacitus in the following extract,

And so, at first, those who confessed were apprehended, and subsequently, on the disclosures they made, a huge number were found guilty – more because of their hatred of mankind than because they were arsonists. As they died they were further subjected to insult. Covered with hides of wild beasts, they perished by being torn to pieces by dogs; or they would be fastened to crosses and, when daylight had gone, burned to provide lighting at night [Tac.*Ann.*15.44].

By looking at this extract, it can be seen that the Christians were executed due to the fact that Nero was looking for scapegoats to put the blame on for the fire that nearly destroyed Rome. However, the punishments that he inflicted upon the Christians occurred not because they were guilty of anything, but because they were despised by the Romans and Nero was looking for

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<sup>37</sup> Yardley, J.C. (trans.). 2008. Tacitus. *The Annals: The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero*. 359-360.

entertainment as well as an outlet for his cruelty. The great fire that nearly destroyed Rome occurred 64 CE, and Nero's resulting persecution of the Christians was considered notorious (Harries & Clark 2012:313). According to Yardley (2008:495), the translator of Tacitus, the "shameful offenses" are explained as allegations of cannibalism as well as infanticide, which is found in the works of writers from the second century CE and these allegations were believed to be true among the Christians from as early as the Neronian period. Harries and Clark reiterate this point of cannibalism, for the Christian authors noted that until 250 CE, persecution of the Christians was provoked by the local reservations of a cult that was seen as perverse because the Christians were believed to have dealt with secret cannibalistic and incestuous rites, and they also refused to take part in the civic religious ceremonies (2012:313). Furthermore, Yardley (2008:495) asserts that Tacitus claims that the Christians were arrested and condemned not because they were believed to be arsonists, but because of who they were. Drinkwater (2019:248) claims that in the end, the Christians were not persecuted for the fact that they were the possible arsonists, but because of their religion.

In *circa* 110 CE, Pliny the Younger, the governor of Bithynia, wrote to Trajan to ask what he should do with the Christians, for he found no evidence that showed they were involved in deviant practices. However, Pliny the Younger continued to execute the ones who refused to renounce on the basis of "the name", namely *nomen Christianum*<sup>38</sup> (Harries & Clark 2012:313). The reply that Pliny the Younger received from Trajan was that the accusations that were given anonymously were to be rejected and the ones who renounced their faith and honoured the Imperial cult were allowed to be set free. It was a normal Roman practice to ban the anonymous accusations that were made against the Christians (Harries & Clark 2012:313). According to Kyle (2001:54), against the viewpoint of the *summa supplicia* as well as the fatal charades, the realistic methods that were used in the execution of Christians in the persecutions seem less surreal or drastic. Kyle states further that the punishment of Christians was not seen as something unique or the biggest source of entertainment in the Roman "spectacles of death", but particular hostility or abuse was most likely involved (2001:55).

Theatre became a place of execution where scenes of execution in plays became real at a later stage and criminals were executed as a form of entertainment. Kyle (2001:54) quotes another scholar named Coleman, who coined the term "fatal charades", which he defined as "the

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<sup>38</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as "Christian name". *Nomen*. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=nomen&la=la#lexicon> / *Christianum*. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=Christianum&la=la#lexicon>



punishment of criminals in a formal public display involving role-play set in a dramatic context; the punishment is usually capital”. Coleman (1990:44) named this practice based on the descriptions given by Tertullian. This term is based on where criminals were placed in mythological roles in *meridiani*<sup>39</sup>. The earliest example that is known is from the late 30s BCE, where Selurus, who was a Sicilian brigand, was placed on top of a model of Mount Etna at Rome where the model collapsed, and he fell into a cage with wild animals in it. Myths and legends became the form of real punishments in the arena. Another example was Laureolus who played the character Prometheus in a play and for the crimes he committed, who was crucified and then mauled by a bear on the stage in the amphitheatre (Kyle 2001:54). The executions that were concluded in the arena usually took place at the “noon break” between the hunt of the wild animals that took place in the morning and the gladiators that took place in the afternoon. These executions were advertised to be part of the normal event and the evidence for these advertisements can be found in Pompeii (Knapp 2011:226). This group was different from the other groups, for they were condemned criminals and did not take part in any sort of contest or sport as the other groups did and sometimes the criminals were immediately executed (Knapp 2011:226-227). These criminals were executed by using different methods, such as tying them up and letting the wild animals loose, sent into the arena without any training or protective equipment and had to fight either the wild animals of other gladiators. Other times the criminals would be sent to the gladiator school and after training they were to fight in the afternoon (Knapp 2011:227).

Rome developed a system called the dual-penalty system that drew a line between two different social statuses and these statuses guaranteed the form of punishment they will receive as well as how severe it would be. The one class, named the *honestiores*<sup>40</sup>, was the class of men that had status, such as senators, knights, military veterans, decurions and so forth (Kyle 2001: 96). Another name for this class was *plebeii*<sup>41</sup> (Carcopino 2003:52). They were also known as the more honourable ones (Knapp 2011:10). The *honestiores* received a lighter penalty (Kyle 2001:96). However, depending on the severity of their crime, they could be spared from punishment but would have to humiliate themselves and their position, and were either

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<sup>39</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Geography”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=meridiani&la=la#lexicon>

<sup>40</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Distinguished/Reputable/Honourable”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=honestiores&la=la#lexicon>

<sup>41</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Plebeian”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=plebeii&la=la#lexicon>



banished, lost their property or relegation (Carcopino 2003:53). Soldiers would also fall in this category, for if they were found guilty of a serious crime, they were spared from being sent to the mines, hard labour and torture. If the soldier was found guilty of a capital crime, he could not be executed like the common criminals were, thus he could not be crucified, thrown to the wild animals or hanged (Knapp 2011:173). However, the fact that the *honestiores* did not receive the most extreme forms of punishment, associated them with true humanity (Coleman 1990:55). In other words, the *honestiores* were not humiliated and did not lose their sense of humanity while being punished.

The other class, named the *humiliores*<sup>42</sup>, were the lower class, who received the harsher penalties. The *honestiores* kept their legal privileges. In other words, people ranking from decurion and above were not meant to be given the harsher punishment unless they committed parricide and/or treason. They were also spared from working in the mines, being crucified, burned alive and from being flogged and tortured (Kyle 2001:96). Another name for this class was *tenuiores*<sup>43</sup> (Carcopino 2003:52). They were also seen as the rest of the freemen, but also the lesser beings of the society with their very low socioeconomic situation (Knapp 2011:10). With regards to the *humiliores*, it was mostly slaves and non-citizens of Rome that received crucifixion as a punishment and later in the empire it was used on humbler citizens. However, it was never applied to soldiers, except if they were found guilty of desertion (Watson & Lintott 2012:396). Moreover, under the Empire, the legal system of Rome endorsed violence against those who were considered to be lowly or disloyal, thus increasingly more victims were punished in the most spectacularly brutal ways (Kyle 2001:55). Some of the slaves and also prisoners, for instance captured Jews after the fall of Jerusalem, fell vulnerable to agitated wild animals, whilst others perished by fire or crucifixion. Furthermore, others died in these fatal charades, at which point they may be nude or dressed in either animal skins or costumes of the gods (Kyle 2001:93). Fire, crucifixion and wild animals presented to Rome a “spectacular means of torture and death” (Kyle 2001:186).

In Rome, executions also took place in the area of the Esquiline and the corpses were either buried, dumped somewhere or left to be exposed for wild animals or birds of prey. As these spectacles of death increased and the city expanded more, the less likely it became that dumping

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<sup>42</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Lowly/Poor/Insignificant”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=humiliores&la=la#lexicon>

<sup>43</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Unimportant/Weak/Feeble”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=tenuiores&la=la#lexicon>

corpses on the Esquiline or other fields that were similar would have been used for the arena disposal (Kyle 2001:168). The pits could be seen as symbolic casting out, along with “non-provision and probable prevention of burial by relatives” (Kyle 2001:168-169). Other options besides using the pits were fire and crucifixion (Kyle 2001:169). Besides using other options of dumping the bodies, the Tiber River was also used as a means of discarding corpses (Kyle 2001:213). Discussions regarding crucifixion is frequently focused on the Christian Gospels as well as the discussion of the historicity of the narrative regarding the death and also the disposal of Jesus. However, executions held in Judea were possibly formed to fit with the local Jewish customs (Kyle 2001:169).

According to archaeology, it would appear that the demise was sped up and that the corpses of the crucified men might be taken down in order to be buried in Judea. However, in Italy, more specifically in Puteoli, the corpses were allowed to be removed only if the order was given that they could be buried. Otherwise, those who died by crucifixion suffered a slow and agonising death, being guarded until they were dead and most likely for a longer time in order to ensure that the corpses were not taken down by the families to be buried (Kyle 2001:169). Crucifixion as a death penalty lasted hours, if not days. However, it was not an entertaining form of death. Nonetheless, the audience received their satisfaction of this punishment by watching how the body was hoisted upon the cross (Coleman 1990:56). The death penalty was quite common to use for those who were considered to be outlaws, who were subjected to two of the most humiliating deaths, namely crucifixion or death by wild animals. However, after crucifixion, the corpses were left on the cross to be displayed. The jurist Callistratus claimed that the bodies of bandits should be left on display at the sites they plundered so that it could be a sign of comfort for those that were harmed during their plundering or a sign of fear for those who were considering a life of banditry (Knapp 2011:257). Thus, crucifixion should also be seen as a type of subjection to the elements and the wild animals, for it is believed that outside Judea, it was improbable that most of the corpses would have been taken down or even allowed to be buried after crucifixion (Kyle 2001:169). Professional gladiators were allowed to be buried since they earned it. However, some of the arenas had to get rid of the waste, which was probably dumped on the Esquiline during the period of the Republic. Fire, crucifixion and wild animals were “means more of killing than of disposal, and that arena meat was probably distributed to the people of Rome” (Kyle 2001:213). However, there are not many sources regarding the large number of human victims from the arena, which is why a possibility could be that the Tiber River was used as a possible dumping site for corpses (Kyle 2001:213). The

possibility of using the Tiber River as a dumping site seems more plausible, since by looking at the topography of Rome, the sites where these spectacles of death took place were near flowing water (Kyle 2001:214).

Julius Caesar, as a young person, was captured by pirates and held for ransom. However, he felt insulted that the pirates only asked for 20 talents whereas he felt that he was worth at least 50 talents. Young Julius Caesar told his captors that he would have them all crucified due to the fact that he felt offended. After his release, he gathered a few soldiers and ships and tracked down the pirates and had them all crucified (Aldrete 2004:216). During Republican Rome, there were a number of slave revolts. The most famous revolt was led by Spartacus, who was a Thracian that served as an auxiliary in the Roman army. After he fell into slavery, he was sent to a gladiator school in Capua. In 73 BCE, he gathered his fellow gladiators and slaughtered their overseers (Aldrete 2004:68). He then proceeded to gather an army of 90 000 slaves, barbarians and disgruntled people. This army defeated three Roman armies as well as two consuls and then proceeded to march up to Italy. They managed to reach the Alps and then turned back to Italy where they were cornered at the heel of Italy by three Roman armies. Most of Spartacus' army managed to escape with the help of pirates, but he was left alone with a few of his followers where they were killed in battle. However, around 6000 of his followers were captured and they were crucified on the Appian Way (Aldrete 2004:68). As stated by Aldrete, "... so for hundreds of miles along this main road there was a constant row of crucified slaves serving as a warning to any other who might revolt. Indeed, after this, there were no other major slave revolts" (2004:68).

Rome instituted a new rule that denied burial and burial rites in certain cases, more specifically in the cases of the people who committed suicide by hanging themselves, it became tradition to abuse the corpse in order to intimidate the living during the era of the monarchy. The Romans detested suicide by hanging, and Pliny commented on this fact by saying that when citizens committed suicide to escape the hardships of building sewers under the rule of Tarquinius Priscus, he crucified everyone who committed suicide and left them to be peered at by their fellow citizens as well as to be torn apart by wild animals and birds of prey (Kyle 2001:131).

One example of crucifixion being used in an attempt to silence the masses is written in *The Civil Wars* by Appian. According to him, there was a rumour that Amatius would ambush Brutus and Cassias. Consul Antonius arrested Amatius based on this rumour and sentenced him to death without a trial. However, the followers of Amatius were upset and angry about

this and occupied the Forum while shouting and cursing at Antonius [App.B Civ.3.3]. The crowd was driven out of the Forum by soldiers that Antonius sent in and after they were driven out, the crowd became even angrier, and some of them noticed that the statues of Caesars were removed from the plinths. However, a man said that he would show them the workshop to where the statues had been taken. The crowd then followed him and set fire to the workshop. Thus, Antonius sent more soldiers. Some of the people of the crowd resisted and were killed. Others were taken into custody and then crucified if they were slaves. Those who were free men were thrown off from the Tarpeian rock [App.B Civ.3.3]. This section from the *Civil Wars* affirms the fact that slaves were more likely to be crucified than those from other classes or social statuses.

Christians were seen as the enemies of Rome, and their burial sites were not seen and respected as holy ground, which would explain why their corpses were abused as well as their cemeteries. Martyrs would endure their torments heroically; however, the problem that would arise was that they provided frustration for the audience rather than entertainment. According to Kyle (2001:248), “In Christian eyes the volunteerism, even the enthusiasm, of martyrs for death ‘sacralized’ them as worthy of sacrifice and resurrection, but in Roman eyes they were disturbing, threatening heretics” (2001:248). It would appear that the Christians knew they were facing death and resisting it would be futile. Thus, it would appear that they decided to face their horrific deaths with bravery and perhaps even with enthusiasm. However, bravery and enthusiasm does not provide entertainment, for the audience expects fear and hopelessness as people try to prevent their death in the arena or fight it. Eusebius wrote of the persecution of the Egyptians in Tyre that followed Christianity in 305 CE in his *Historia ecclesiastica*<sup>44</sup>. The Egyptians were scourged, tortured and suffered different forms of torment, some were burned, some thrown into the sea and others offered their heads to be cut off quite courageously. Some died while being tortured and others from starvation. Some were impaled and others were nailed upside down with their head facing the ground and would be kept alive until they died from starvation [Eus.Hist. eccl. 8.8].

## **6.2. Beheading**

Citizens of status had the privilege of being executed in a quick and unaggravated way, by means of decapitation at the border of the town, which was also seen as the most discreet form of execution (Kyle 2001:53). Moog and Karenberg (2010:142) add to this by saying that

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<sup>44</sup> Deferrari, R.J. (tr.). 2005. *The Fathers of the Church: Eusebius Pamphili: Ecclesiastical History*.

decapitation was seen as one of the most respectable forms of execution. Interestingly enough, according to Jońca (2019:339) beheading is one of the most puzzling forms of executions from ancient Rome. Non-citizens, such as the *noxii*, forfeited the rights and obligations of the *mos*<sup>45</sup> and also the *lex*<sup>46</sup>, which included the right to exile, suicide or normal execution by beheading, also known as *ad gladium*<sup>47</sup>. The *noxii* faced *summa suplicia*, which was the worst methods of aggravated capital punishment (Kyle 2001:91). Private decapitations at the border of the town or even strangulations in prisons dwindled due to the fact that brutal executions that were performed in the public thrived. Furthermore, the needs for arena resources climbed and the cost of professional gladiators became too expensive, so the emperors authorised the “spectacular” use of condemned criminals (Kyle 2001:102). Due to the fact that Christians were poor forms of entertainment for the Romans, the “Governors went from theatricalizing or trivializing Christian deaths in charades to downplaying them as quiet decapitations outside the arena” (Kyle 2001:248). The Romans then dealt with their enemy, the Christians, with various methods, including execution in the arena and subjecting them to the worst forms of torture outside the arena. The accepted method of execution by beheading was with either an axe or a sword (Mendoza 2022:12). The Romans used beheading on their enemies, and the heads of the enemies were seen either as a trophy, gift of “goodwill” or even a way to terrorise their enemies or discourage them (Mendoza 2022:13).

In 87 BCE, during the reign of terror of Cinna and Marius, they had equestrians and senators killed and the senators decapitated. Appian, a Greek historian who held Roman citizenship, wrote that the dead were denied burial and that the corpses were left to be torn apart by dogs and birds of prey of these distinguished people. Denial of burial even appeared in official documents as well as in imperial policies (Kyle 2001:132). According to the historian Suetonius, the corpse of Brutus was first abused by Philippi Octavian and thereafter it was decapitated. When a distinguished prisoner asked for a decent burial, the reply he received was that it was up to the birds of prey. Augustus and his subjects understood that the denial of burial

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<sup>45</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Custom”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=mos&la=la#lexicon>

<sup>46</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Law”.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=lex&la=la#lexicon>

<sup>47</sup> Translation according to Lewis and Short. Translated as “Towards the sword”. *Ad*.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ad&la=la#lexicon> / *Gladium*.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=gladium&la=la#lexicon>

also served as additional punishment to anyone who showed disloyalty and also treason (Kyle 2001:132).

The methodical abuse of the corpse by means of decapitation, the denial of burial or any burial rites, the dooming of the family in terms of having no property or a wife to remarry, and also the disposal of the corpses by using water were all aimed at the idea of attaining vengeance after death, or in other words the *damnatio memoriae* (Kyle 2001:220). Another form of *damnatio memoriae* can be found in the displayed heads of senators around the Rostra and the Lacus Servilius, which was a watering area (Kyle 2001:221). One instance of the head of a consul that was displayed was that of consul Octavius. In 87 BCE, the forces of Cinna and Marius entered Rome and first killed the consul and then decapitated him. According to the historian Appian, consul Octavius was the first consul whose head was displayed in front of the Rostra in the forum; however, he was not the last, for many senators lost their heads and were then displayed in front of the Rostra as well (Kyle 2001:234). Kyle (2001:235) mentions a scholar by the name of Voisin, who commented that the Romans hunted head from the early Republic to the late Empire, meaning that they did not only decapitate the bodies, but they also transported the heads in order to display them. He continued with this by pointing out that there was change that happened over time, which was the “development from the decapitation of foreign foes by elite Romans to the decapitation of Roman citizens by lowly, obscure persons seeking a reward – a practice which spread (after its introduction in 121 BCE) to head-hunting by cruel emperors, but one which kept a continuous emphasis on the heads of adult males of status” (Kyle 2001:235). By looking at this quote from Voisin in translation, it would appear that the Romans stopped decapitating their enemies as a form of victory by the elite Romans, namely those who had high ranks in the Roman army, but now the Roman citizens were being decapitated by people from lower classes in exchange for rewards. It would also appear that the practice of head-hunting that was introduced by cruel emperors is similar to modern-day bounties, and providing the head of, for instance, a senator or consul would earn a person more rewards than the head of someone from a different class or social status. Voisin continued by saying that head-hunting can also be seen as a form of denial of burial (Kyle 2001:235). Mendoza (2022:39) adds to this ‘head-hunting’ by saying that the heads were used as a proof of death or death claims. In the Latin language, there are various expressions which show that the head was used in order to indicate ideas of revenge and punishment. The head was also understood as a synonym for life, since beheading was a common practice in the Roman judicial system and also sometimes used in the extrajudicial system (Mendoza 2022:96).

Adding to the point of heads being transported, one example is found in the *Civil Wars*, namely the death of Trebonius, the governor of Asia. Trebonius was fortifying towns in the interest of Brutus and Cassius and he would not allow Dolabella to enter either Pergamum or Smyrna. Trebonius only allowed Dolabella to buy provisions outside the city walls, as he was a consul. Dolabella pretended to march to Ephesus, as Trebonius said that he will allow him to enter the city, and then laid a trap for the few soldiers that followed him [App.B Civ.3.26]. Dolabella killed them and went back to Smyrna. After finding the walls unmanned, he scaled the wall. Trebonius was in bed and said to his captors that they should take him to Dolabella. However, his captors replied by saying that he is not the one going with him, but rather his head. And immediately they decapitated him and once daylight came, Dolabella gave the order that the head of Trebonius should be displayed on the governor's tribunal where Trebonius conducted business while still being alive [App.B Civ.3.26]. According to Kyle (2001:235), the manner in which Trebonius was executed and humiliated is how the first of the murderers were punished.

An example given of humiliation of death by means of decapitation as well as a form of *damnatio memoriae*, is that of the death of Cicero by Antony. Plutarch notes down this event in the *Vitae Parallelae Antonius*<sup>48</sup>. While reaching a point of reconciliation, Octavian sacrificed Cicero to Antony, Antony gave up on his uncle, and Lucius Caesar and Lepidus executed his brother, Paullus [Plut.Vit.Ant.19]. In order to complete a reconciliation, the soldiers crowded around the three leaders, namely Octavian, Antony and Lepidus. The soldiers demanded that Octavian should marry Clodia, the daughter of Antony's wife Fluvia, This was agreed upon and the triumvirs condemned the death of three hundred men, including Cicero. After the death of Cicero, Antony ordered that his head and right hand should be cut off, due to the fact that Cicero was right-handed and used that to write out his invectives against Antony. After these parts were brought to Antony, he laughed while being delighted, and he nailed them above the Rostra in the Forum. Antony acted as if he successfully inflicted humiliation upon a dead man [Plut.Vit.Ant.20].

By looking at the Romans and the practice of head-hunting, an example can be found in Plutarch's *Vitae Parallelae Galba*<sup>49</sup>. Galba, who was emperor at the time, was considered to be a "bad emperor" and was not much loved by the citizens of Rome. Before he met his demise, there were rumours that Otho was killed and Galba decided to go out to sacrifice to Jupiter and

<sup>48</sup> Scott-Kilvert, I. & Pelling, C. (trans.). 2010. Plutarch. *Rome in Crisis: Nine Lives by Plutarch*.

<sup>49</sup> Scott-Kilvert, I. & Pelling, C. (trans.). 2010. Plutarch. *Rome in Crisis: Nine Lives by Plutarch*.



appear before the citizens. By the time he arrived at the Forum, there was a new rumour that circulated that Otho was in control of the camp. There was a crowd around Galba where some said that he should return, while others said that he should continue forward. In the meantime, horsemen and foot-soldiers appeared, and the crowd parted for them so that they could go through to the carriage where Galba was [Plut.*Vit.Galb.*26]. One person broke a statue of Galba and the other soldiers started throwing their javelins at the carriage and then proceeded with drawn swords [Plut.*Vit.Galb.*26]. The carriage was turned over and Galba fell out. The soldiers descended upon him and started pounding him [Plut.*Vit.Galb.*27]. He received many blows until he finally received the deathblow. His head was then cut off and they scooped the head up with the cloak, since Galba was bald. However, the other soldiers said that the head should not be hidden, and so it was fixed on top of a spear. The head was brought to Otho, along with the head of Piso, Vinius and also Laco, who were among the bodyguards of Galba [Plut.*Vit.Galb.*27]. By showing these heads, they received rewards; however, citizens rubbed blood on themselves and their swords and demanded rewards as well [Plut.*Vit.Galb.*27]. By looking at this extract from Plutarch, it can be seen that head-hunting almost became similar to that of the games that were held, since people received rewards for the heads of the enemies of the State and others also tried to claim the rewards when they were nowhere near the original bloodshed. It can also be seen from this extract that not only was it seen as a form of some game, but also as a form of *damnatio memoriae*, since the statue of Galba was first broken before he was attacked and his head was cut off and paraded around on a spear.

Eusebius mentions how martyrs in Thebais were tortured in the most cruel manners and how some were executed by decapitation or by fire. So many martyrs were executed on one day that the axes became blunt, worn out and even broke in pieces and the executioners became weary and had to take turns [Eus. *Hist. eccl.*8.9]. Eusebius also mentioned that a day of beast-fighting was arranged for the Christians mentioning four names: Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina, and Attalus (Kyle 2001:249). Kyle (2001:260) mentioned a scholar named Potter, who mentions that it was believed that Attalus had an enemy in a high place and at Lyons, only the Christians that were connected to Attalus were punished, not the entire community of Christians. Potter further states that the governor succumbed to the local hatred for Attalus and disobeyed the emperor's orders that the citizens had to be decapitated (Kyle 2001:260).

### **6.3. Stoning**

It seems that stoning is not a popular topic for research purposes, for there is not an abundance of sources available. Even though the Romans did decapitate criminals, other forms of



execution included flogging, crucifixion and also stoning. Death alone was not enough of a punishment, thus the criminals had to receive a beating before being put to death (Bush & Stirland 1991: 208). Nippel (1995:43) states that in Greek and Jewish culture, stoning was on the same level as ritualised killings. On the one hand it was seen as the collective execution of legal punishment, and on the other hand it was seen as a spontaneous action of instant execution of justice (Nippel 1995:43). Nonetheless, stoning someone to death as a group was not an original Roman tradition, except with punishment given to soldiers where they were either clubbed or stoned to death by their comrades if they deserted the army and the stoning of rebellious soldiers of officials (Nippel 1995:43). Stoning was categorised under popular justice. Popular justice took on many forms: some were more aggressive to exact punishment, and others were more defensive, where the first aim was to prevent harm although punishment might have followed (Lintott 1968:6-7). Lintott stated that the most drastic form of punishment is lynching with the most frequent practised in the ancient world by stoning (1968:7).

An example of a case of stoning, or almost being stoned to death, is Xenophon. When he was threatened with stoning, he chose an assembly over a lynch mob (Kiesling 2006:231). In 38 BCE, there were problems with the corn supply in Rome, which led to a famine and also a riot. When Octavius and Antony tried, in vain, to quiet the masses in the Forum, they were stoned. Afterwards, Antony called out the army and ordered a massacre (Kyle 2001:221). By looking at this example of stoning, it would appear that they were not killed by means of stoning, but that stoning was used as a means to silence Octavius and Antony, for their attempt to calm the people was only angering them and not helping the situation.

There is apparently one case where Christians were used in the arena because the true gladiators were either unavailable or too expensive to use. According to Eusebius, the Christian victims endured quite heroically all that the people as a whole piled up upon them, for instance they were abused, received blows and were dragged, their possessions plundered, they were stoned and imprisoned, and more that would be expected to be inflicted on the most hated enemies of an enraged crowd (Kyle 2001:249).

Another example of stoning was mentioned by Eusebius. He mentioned the death of James the Just. Nevertheless, the account he gave was the most accurate account written by Hegesippus. Hegesippus belonged to the first generation after the Apostles [Eus. *Hist eccl.* 2.23]. James the Just stood on the turret of the Temple and was told by the Scribes and Pharisees that he must try to persuade the people to not be led astray by Jesus [Eus. *Hist eccl.* 2.23]. However, James

the Just did the opposite of what the Scribes and Pharisees asked of him, and which angered them. The Scribes and Pharisees subsequently threw James off the turret and said that he must be stoned. So the Scribes and Pharisees began to stone him; however, since he was thrown off the turret, he did not die. One of the priests said that the Scribes and Pharisees must stop, for James is praying for them. But one of the laundrymen took a club that he used to beat the clothes and struck James the Just over the head. And so James the Just also suffered martyrdom [Eus. *Hist eccl.* 2.23].

## **7. Summary**

By looking at the extracts from ancient sources on the deaths of emperors and important people, for instance Cicero, these deaths can almost all be seen as a form of pettiness. The people responsible for their deaths had gone beyond the “normal” forms of execution and abused their corpses in order to either make a point that they deserved it or to prove that they were better than them and also more powerful. The ancient Greek tragedies inspired the Romans to create their own version of the tragedies. The ancient Roman tragedies evolved from copying the Greek tragedies and using Greek myths to creating Roman tragedies. The Roman theatres were also inspired by the Greek theatres, but their significance differs. At first, the Roman theatres were places where plays and performances were held, but they changed over time into arenas for spectacles of wild animals, gladiators and so forth. In time, the arena became the place where the executions took place for the purpose of public entertainment. The audience took great pleasure in watching the condemned suffer, whether it was being torn apart by wild animals, fighting to the death as untrained gladiators or being burned alive. The ancient Greeks would appear to be more “civilised” in terms of capital punishment, for they would rather exile someone or have them poisoned than having a public spectacle of death. Nonetheless, the ancient Greeks did have capital punishments that were the same as the ancient Romans, for instance stoning and beheading. The ancient Romans only took capital punishment further by making it more public and extravagant. The Romans had more methods of executing victims, for instance crucifixion, beheading, fire and wild animals. Crucifixions were not an entertaining form of punishment, for it took too long. Further, the Christians did not resist their fate of execution and they were also poor forms of entertainment. Therefore, the Christians were silently executed by beheading outside the arena.

### 3. A Murderous Tale

## Murder in the New Testament

#### 1. Introduction

According to Carson and Moo, the first three gospels of the Bible, namely Matthew, Mark, and Luke, were documented as the Synoptic Gospels by J.J. Griesbach (2005:77). He used this term, which was based on the Greek word *συνοψις*, which is translated as “seeing together.” Thus, this word was chosen by Griesbach due to the fact that Matthew, Mark and Luke share a high level of similarity with regard to the ministry of Jesus. Not only are these three gospels bound to one another, but they are also separated from the Gospel of John (Carson & Moo 2005:77). With regards to the Synoptic Problem, a solution to the problem was thought to be the idea that the authors of these gospels copied the same written sources where at times they kept the words of these sources, but other times changed the wording in order to fit their context or narrative (Ehrman 2017:60). Many of the accounts found in the three gospels are missing from John, for in John the focus is mainly on Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem during his occasional visits to the city (Carson & Moo 2005:77). According to Ehrman, it does not appear that the authors of the gospels were bystanders to the events that they wrote about (2017:51).

In connection with the genre of the gospels, nowhere in the New Testament is there any evidence pointing out the fact that the four narrations of Jesus’ ministry were called a gospel. The term ‘gospel’ is derived from the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον*, which is translated as “glad tidings” or “the preaching of.” However, the word “Gospel” and the verb *εὐαγγελίζομαι*, which is translated as “to bring good news,” are used in the New Testament, especially used by Paul to signify the “message of God’s saving act in his Son” (Carson & Moo 2005:112). Presumably toward the end of the first century or early second century, there were titles added to the church’s recognised accounts of Jesus’ ministry. These titles that were added to maintain the stress on the singleness of the gospel in the way that they are phrased, for instance, it is not the Gospel by Mark, but rather the Gospel of Mark (Carson & Moo 2005:113). With regards to the classification of the gospels, the modern study of the genre began with K.L. Schmidt, who decided to classify it as “popular literature” rather than “literary literature.” This classification also entails the fact that the gospels “were to be viewed as distinct from the more literary biographies of various types prevalent in the ancient Greco-Roman world” (Carson & Moo 2005:113). In other words, the gospels are considered to be very different from the biographies

that are found all over the Greco-Roman world and would not be considered biography. However, another scholar slightly disagrees with this viewpoint, namely C.H. Dodd, for he viewed the gospels as mirroring the early Christian preaching about Christ (Carson & Moo 2005:113). It was believed that the gospels could not be fitted into an ancient literary genre but were considered to be unique. Nevertheless, other scholars believed that even though the gospels have unique features, they do share a few other features with other literary works from the ancient world so that they could be placed into the genre of these works. There are a few options, for instance Greek aretology, which are stories about the miraculous deed of a godlike hero, or Jewish midrash. Nonetheless, the most popular suggestion is that the gospels are considered to be gospels (Carson & Moo 2005:114). This chapter will look at the murders found in the New Testament selected texts. The selected texts will be analysed by using the information provided by Chapter 2 in terms of the different execution methods used.

## **2. Murder in the New Testament: Beheading, Crucifixion and Stoning**

Murder is not an occurrence that is only found in the present times, for there are many instances of murder found in the ancient times. Even though some of the methods that were ‘popular’ to use in ancient times, for example during the Hellenistic Period, many or some motives that drove people to commit these acts of violence remain the same. Murder and death are not an uncommon occurrence in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. To ascertain how the murders in the New Testament differ from one another is to determine both method and motive. Furthermore, determining the motive behind the murders can also help determine whether there is a sense of pettiness involved or not.

Interestingly enough, these murders of the New Testament contradict two commandments from the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20<sup>50</sup>. The murders that contradict the two commandments are the beheading of John the Baptist, the crucifixion of Jesus and the stoning of Stephen. The first commandment that is contradicted is from Exodus 20:13, οὐ μοιχεύσεις, “You will not murder.” And the second commandment that is contradicted is from Exodus 20:16, οὐ ψευδομαρτυρήσεις κατὰ τοῦ πλησίον σου μαρτυρίαν ψευδῇ, “You will not bear false witness concerning your deceitful testimony of those near (you).” By looking at these two commandments, it is shown in the following texts that the commandments were broken. Murder was committed by means of crucifixion, beheading and stoning. False witness was

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<sup>50</sup> The Septuagint version was used for the translation of the Greek text. The Septuagint version used was found on the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, <https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/septuagint-lxx/read-the-bible-text/bibel/text/lesen/stelle/2/200001/209999/ch/91fcc08929b8a0a2a9c44cb44a028b73/>

delivered with the trial of Jesus in order to show the necessary evidence to convict Him and execute Him. False witness was also delivered against Stephen, for his audience refused to listen to what he was saying and were looking for a reason to execute him.

The texts that will be discussed are from the three gospels, namely Mark 6:14-29, Matthew 26:1-5 and 27:33-56, and Luke 22:1-2 and 23:26-49 and Acts 7:1, 54-58 and 8:1. The murders that will be discussed are the beheading of John the Baptist, the crucifixion of Jesus and the stoning of Stephen.

## **2.1. Introduction to Mark**

Mark is considered to be one of the subtlest and also the most enigmatic of the gospels (Holladay 2005:146). Interestingly enough, Holladay (2005:148-149) writes the following about the Gospel of Mark, “When scholars characterize Mark as mysterious revelation or apocalyptic drama, they are not trying to complicate what is simple. Rather, they are inviting us to experience the Gospel of Mark as a subtly written narrative that seriously probes the question, ‘Who is Jesus?’”. By looking at this quote, it would appear that the Gospel of Mark is not a straightforward text but is rather more complicated than one would expect. There is more to the Gospel of Mark than just a narrative text that describes events and the ministry of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark, the ministry of Jesus is more action-oriented (Carson & Moo 2005:169).

Just as with the other three gospels, Mark is anonymous, with the title “According to Mark” most likely having been added when the canonical Gospels were all collected, and it was needed to distinguish the Gospel of Mark from the other Gospels (Carson & Moo 2005:172). There is not a lot of information available regarding the author of Mark, but it is assumed that the author was a Greek-speaking Christian who possibly lived outside of Palestine and also heard many stories about Jesus (Ehrman 2017:61). It is also deduced that even though Mark was not present at the events that are contained in the gospel, he could have received eyewitness testimonies through the apostle Peter (Beale & Gladd 2020:69). The three gospels predict the fall of Jerusalem in *circa* 70 CE, but keeping in mind the dates when Nero persecuted the Christians, it is believed that Mark was written around that time in the mid-60s (Beale & Gladd 2020:70).

### **2.1.1. Mark 6:14-29: The beheading of John the Baptist**

The beheading of John the Baptist is found in Mark 6. However, the account of his death is also found in Matthew and Luke, where Matthew contains the same details as in Mark, but Luke has a lot of details omitted.

The Greek text depicts the scene leading up to the death of John the Baptist. In a short summary of the text, the scene renders King Herod hearing about someone who is becoming well-known among the people. There are various accounts on who the people think this person might be. Some said that it was John the Baptist. However, this happened after John the Baptist was already killed. The verses following the ‘introduction,’ Mark 6:17-29, would be considered a ‘flashback’ to before death, the reason for it and the end result, namely the beheading of John the Baptist. According to Culpepper (2007:198), Mark places this scene strategically at this point in the Gospel, and this placement appears to be done on purpose for several reasons. John was the forerunner to the death of Jesus, because he first preaches and is then arrested. With this the pattern is set, for Jesus preached and He too would be arrested and put to death (Culpepper 2007:198). John was also the messenger of God, for he announced the coming of Jesus (Moloney 2001:659). The death of John took place during a “drunken feast”, and in a gruesome twist, his head is served on a platter to the king and his guests (Culpepper 2007:198).

The ‘King Herod’ mentioned in verse 14 is Herod Antipas, who was the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Stein 2008: 300). However, the title of Herod was tetrarch, but he lost his title when he requested the title of ‘king’ at the prompting of Herodias (Culpepper 2007:201). Emperor Gaius Caligula banished Herod to Gaul in 37 CE when he asked for the title of king (Weren 2019:2). The ‘someone’ who was mentioned, of whom the people were speaking, were Jesus and his great fame (Stein 2008:300). The ‘miraculous powers’ that are mentioned in verse 14 are the powers that are at work in Jesus with regards to the miracles that he performed. However, it is unclear whether the powers are also a reference to John and whether or not he was capable of performing miracles, although there is no evidence found in the gospels (Stein 2008:301). According to Culpepper (2007:201), there are no references made in the gospels that John had performed miracles. Verse 16 contains the first indication of what this section is about, for “Herod said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, is risen.’” This is also the first time that Mark mentions the exact way in which John died (Culpepper 2007:202). One can view this scene as a form of guilt, for Herod seems to be worried about the fact that John could have risen from the dead and could be afraid that he would come to find Herod and exact revenge.

Verse 17 begins with the γὰρ clause, which is the beginning point of the explanation as to why Herod beheaded John. The two Greek words ἐκράτησεν and ἔδησεν, which translated means ‘seized’ and ‘bound,’ refer to the fate of John after Herod sends word that John must be captured and thrown into prison. According to Stein, these two Greek words are considered to be used often to describe the arrest of John (2008:302). Further along in verse 17, it would appear that Mark tries to place the emphasis of the blame on Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother Philip (Stein 2008:302). The blame being put on Herodias would be that perhaps Herod arrested John due to being prodded by Herodias, with the mentioning of “on account of Herodias” in verse 17 (Culpepper 2007:202). There is also the possibility that the reason for the arrest of John by Herod is that he fears his popularity and that there might be a revolt by the followers of John. Furthermore, it appears that it is only after the arrest John tells Herod it was wrong to marry the wife of your brother (Stein 2008:302). Culpepper also suggests that perhaps Herod arrests John in order to protect him from Herodias (2007:202). Weren (2019:3) adds to this by saying that “on account of Herodias” can be seen as the reason for the arrest of John due to her being married to Herod. However, the real problem does not lie with the fact that she is married to her first husband’s brother, but that her first husband is still alive.

The version of the beheading of John found in Matthew showcases that the wish to kill John is assigned to Herod; however, in contrast, Mark allocates more space to describe the event that leads to the death of John but places more emphasis on the responsibility of the “murderous ‘Jezebel’” (Stein 2008:304). Herod is afraid of John the Baptist, as seen in verse 20, because he knows that he is a righteous man. The fact that Herod regards John as a righteous and holy man also hints at the idea that John is innocent (Culpepper 2007:202). According to Stein (2008:304), the confusion in the mind of Herod makes his action more damnable, especially since the death of John the Baptist is unwarranted due to the fact that he has not commit any crime. Quite the opposite, John the Baptist was proclaiming God’s truth and the fact that those who are considered to be evil prefer that which the world offers, including public praise. Unfortunately, death is usually the fate that the servants of God face (Stein 2008:304). Weren (2019:4) suggests that Herodias views Herod as a weakling since he has the power to kill John but did not put him to death immediately, whereas she wants to kill him but does not have the power to do so.

Verse 21 and 22 are combined in a single sentence and begin with three genitive absolutes which translate to “...an opportune day having arrived...”, which shows that the day which Herodias has been looking forward to has arrived. These three genitives are also seen as the



text leading up to the climactic section, in other words the manner in which Herodias succeeds in getting rid of John (Culpepper 2007:203). However, according to Cranfield (2005:210), the “opportune” is ambiguous, for does the author mean an opportune day for Herod or for Herodias? Knight (2017:1) adds that this scene is where Herodias achieves retribution against John, since he wants to denunciate her marriage to Herod. In verse 21, a banquet is held for the birthday of Herod, which various guests from higher classes attend. The guests are mentioned as “noblemen and the leasing (men) of Galilee,” which would suggest that Herod has to act contradictory to his judgement (Stein 2008:305).

The girl, who is believed to be the daughter of Herodias, dances for the king and his guests. However, it is unclear whose daughter it is. In the version found in Matthew, the girl is described as the daughter of Herodias, and in Josephus’ version the girl is described as the daughter of Herodias and Philip (Culpepper 2007: 203). However, in the Greek text the daughter is described as τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρῳδιάδος, which translated means “his daughter of Herodias,” which suggests that it was the daughter of Herod and Herodias. Nonetheless, Culpepper argues that some scribes tried to change the account of Mark by changing the αὐτοῦ to αὐτῆς and he calls this an awkward construction that should be translated as “the daughter of Herodias herself” (2007: 203).

Verse 23-24 show that the king is so impressed with the girl’s dance that he swears an oath that anything she asks for he will give to her. After leaving, she goes to her mother for advice on what to ask the king, to which her mother replies that she should ask for the head of John the Baptist. This verse begins with the words καὶ εἰσελθοῦσα εὐθὺς μετὰ σπουδῆς, which translated means “And immediately having entered with haste.” Further urgency with this request is with this word in the girl’s speech to the king ἐξαυτῆς, which means “at once.” This also shows the eagerness of Herodias, and the head of John the Baptist serves as proof of his death (Stein 2008: 306). Furthermore, this request also shows Herodias’ success in catching Herod in public in his own reckless promise (Culpepper 2007:304). In verse 26, the king is presented as “having been made intensely sad” (περίλυπος γινόμενος) by this request and also the fact that he knows John is a righteous and holy man who did nothing wrong. Due to the oaths that he makes to the girl in front of his guests, he cannot refuse her request. According to Stein (2008:306), the keeping of an oath was bestowed with far more importance in biblical times than in present times, and a vow or oath was considered to be permanent. Furthermore, his relationships with the “leading (men) of Galilee” is based on promises, and if Herod refuses the request of the daughter, he will suffer public shame and he would lose the loyalty of these prominent figures,



for it would show that he deems promises as worthless (Culpepper 2007:204). The head being brought to Herod on a platter could be seen as a trophy. The head on a platter could also be seen as a method to discourage anyone who might cross Herodias or Herod in any way that would anger them or place them in an uncomfortable situation. The uncomfortable situation would refer to John the Baptist pointing out to them that they were breaking the law by their marriage.

In response to the request made by the girl, Herod “immediately” (εὐθὺς) sends an executioner to the prison where John the Baptist is being held. Even though Herod is upset about this request, he still sends an executioner immediately (Culpepper 2007:205). According to Stein, σπεκουλάτορα is a word that is borrowed from Latin and can only be found here in the New Testament (2008:307). Culpepper (2007:205) adds to this by saying that this Latin loanword is used to describe soldiers who carried out executions as well as other covert actions. By looking at this sentence at the end of verse 27 καὶ ἀπελθὼν ἀπεκεφάλισεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ, which is translated as “And having gone he beheaded him in the prison,” one would assume that the whole process takes place in a matter of minutes (Stein 2008:307). Mark does not specify the location of the banquet or prison, however, the “leading (men) of Galilee” in verse 21 would suggest that the banquet took place in Tiberias (Culpepper 2007:200). However, there are suggestions that the banquet took place in the fortress of Machaerus, and that John was imprisoned there. If that is the case, then the process of beheading John would have taken a few minutes. However, if the banquet was held in Tiberias and John was imprisoned in Machaereus, then it would have taken a few days to travel between Tiberius and Machaerus to behead John and bring back the head. There is also no mention of the guests and the banquet by the time the executioner brought the head to Herod in verse 28 (Stein 2008: 307). It is not mentioned how John is decapitated, but if it is according to the Roman methods of execution, it will either be with an axe or a sword. However, the Romans did favour the sword later on when beheading a criminal. With reference to the article “Death in Greek Tragedy” by R. Sri Pathmanathan, the death of John the Baptist falls under “The ‘Grand Guignol’ type of death and the holocaust” and also “Remote Death.” With regards to Remote Death, the beheading takes place in the prison, and how it happens is not described in detail. The ‘Grand Guignol’ death is a death that takes place somewhere else, and it is then reported via a messenger. However, in the case of John the Baptist, there is no messenger, but the “messenger” can be seen as his head being brought in, which would then bring forth the message that he was executed. Remote Death is also reported by means of a messenger, as stated by Sri

Pathmanathan (1965:5), “So, whenever a remote death takes place in the course of action, it is reported by a messenger [...]”.

The death of John the Baptist is placed first in this section of murders found in the New Testament, since the death of John the Baptist is considered foreshadow the death of Jesus. It can be said that John the Baptist is the beginning of the Jesus movement, especially since he baptises Jesus in the river and continues the movement by means of his preaching. There are many parallels between the death of John the Baptist and the death of Jesus. The method differs between the two deaths, but the similarity lies in what happens before death, as it is first the preaching and the gaining of a large mass of followers, then the arrest and then the execution. The crucifixion can be perceived as a result of the death of John the Baptist, for the beheading of John the Baptist can be seen as the removal of the “head” of the movement, but not without any consequences. The consequences result in the crucifixion, amongst others, and also fear in the Roman government. Moloney (2001:660) sets out the following explanation for the death of John the Baptist as well as the consequences following this death: “John’s martyrdom not only prefigured Jesus’ death, it also prefigured the death of anyone who would come after him!”. This would suggest that the death of John can also be categorised as that of a martyr; however, it would seem a bit unlikely to categorise John as a martyr. The death of John is not due to his religion or preaching, but rather that, by speaking out the truth, he managed to upset people in powerful positions. The death of John is the consequence of speaking truth to power and pointing out that Herod and Herodias are breaking the law.

The beheading of John the Baptist is found in two other gospels, namely Matthew and Luke. The account found in Matthew is very similar to that found in Mark. However, the account in Luke is very short and only contains the section where Herod hears the people speaking about Jesus, with some saying it is Elijah and others saying that John has risen from the dead. The beheading scene is not found in Luke. In Matthew, it is said that Herod wishes to kill John for what he has said regarding the marriage with Herodias; however, he does not kill him for he feared the masses, since they hold John as a prophet, as seen in Matthew 14:3-5. The account regarding the birthday banquet of Herod is shorter in Matthew than in Mark; however, the overall narrative stays the same: the girl is urged by her mother to ask for the head of John the Baptist.

By looking at this text which describes the beheading of John the Baptist, it would appear that it does not completely follow the Roman method of execution. John is not really considered an

enemy of the state or a criminal of lower-class status. This can be seen as quasi-judicial because Herod had the judicial authority to order the beheading but had no real reason for the order. In another sense, this can also be seen as extra-judicial because the order and the beheading was not done as part of a legal proceeding. Herodias is motivated by anger; thus the motive would appear to be anger and hate. Another motive would also appear to be revenge, for Herodias feels wronged by the fact that John dares to speak against her marriage to Herod saying that it is unlawful. Hate is also considered as a motive, for Herodias hates John due to his speaking the truth. Herod does not appear to have any motives for killing John; however, a possible motive could be fear. Nonetheless, fear would be seen as Herod fearing Herodias, since he seems to be easily persuaded to imprison John for no apparent reason. It is also mentioned in Mark 6 that Herod is afraid of John, since he knows that he is speaking the truth. However, the motives are not strong enough to warrant an execution. Exile or imprisoned for life would have been a more appropriate punishment. The ulterior motive comes to light, which is classified as ‘pettiness’. At first reading of the beheading of John the Baptist, one sees his death as a form of pettiness. The execution action is an extreme form of anger and hate based on pure pettiness. One of the definitions for murder is the “action of killing or destruction of life”, which is also connected to another definition of murder where it states that murder is to kill someone “wickedly, inhumanely or barbarously”. Therefore, the death of John the Baptist is not seen as an execution but rather a malicious and inhumane murder. One of the definitions used for pettiness in the current research study is the definition that states that petty is the behaviour of people that shows small-mindedness or behaving in a spiteful way. With this definition in mind, Herodias appears to act in a spiteful way by demanding the death of John the Baptist. Another definition for petty is when someone treats other people harshly or unfairly due to matters that are considered unimportant. By this account, even though John the Baptist speaks out against power and points out their wrongs by disobeying the law, it does not seem to be an important enough matter to murder someone over. This was a petty reason to kill, and this is a petty death. The following section is about the crucifixion scene found in Matthew, which can be seen as the consequence of the death of John the Baptist.

## **2.2. Introduction to Matthew**

According to Ehrman (2017:77), the Gospel of Matthew was considered to be one of the most valued accounts of the life of Jesus among the early Christians. Matthew also produced a “new foundation narrative” for the readers of this Gospel (Holladay 2005:198). By building on Mark and using the portrait that Mark paints of Jesus, Matthew develops a further understanding of

Jesus in a way that is appropriate for Christians so that they can define themselves over against the church (Holladay 2005:198). According to Wasserman (2012:103), by looking at the early text of the Gospel of Matthew, there are several changes that have taken place in the various manuscripts of Matthew, and it is to be believed that the early scribes made a lot of mistakes and took some liberties while copying from the original and so forth. Nevertheless, even though the scribes made many mistakes over time with the copying of the manuscripts, they never changed the meaning of the text (Wasserman 2012:104).

It is commonly maintained that the Gospel often appointed as Matthew's is anonymous. Until recent times, it was assumed by most scholars that the four Gospels were first circulated anonymously and that the current titles were first connected to the Gospels in *circa* 125 CE (Carson & Moo 2005:140). It is assumed that the author of the Gospel was part of the Greek-speaking community, due to the fact that he wrote his Gospel in Greek, and that he was possibly from outside Palestine (Ehrman 2017:77). However, there is very little evidence to support this date, and it is only based on the assumption that the Gospels were initially entirely anonymous and that perhaps by *circa* 140 CE, or perhaps even earlier, the traditional attributions were known far and wide without any noteworthy variations (Carson & Moo 2005:140). The date of the Gospel of Matthew is mostly reliant on its relationship with both Mark and Luke and based on the fact that there is the possibility that Matthew follows Mark, so it must have been written after Mark (Beale & Gladd 2020:40). Carson and Moo conclude that the majority of the evidence suggests that Matthew was published before 70 CE, but not long before this date (2005:156). According to Beale and Gladd (2020:40), they claim that the Gospel of Matthew was written in the mid to late-60s.

### **2.2.1. Matthew 26:1-5 & 27: 33-56: The crucifixion of Jesus**

The crucifixion of Jesus is mentioned and written down in detail in four Gospels, namely Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The crucifixion will be looked at in two of the Gospels, namely Matthew and Luke. Matthew was chosen because there is an insertion of the scene found in John where the soldier pierces the side of Jesus. Matthew and Luke were chosen because the crucifixion scene is described in more detail in these two books than in the other two. The other two remaining Gospels will also be looked at, but only in the comparing capacity in order to determine the motives behind the reason for the crucifixion and whether the accounts differ in any way. The background regarding the crucifixion will be used in order to determine the motive for the crucifixion in Matthew 27 and whether it was justified or not. Crucifixion was used as an execution method on those who committed treason. By using this as background

and incorporating it into Matthew 26 and 27, one can assume that the reason why the chief priests and elders are so eager to execute Jesus is that they think He has committed religious treason against the Jewish religious views by claiming that He is the King. The Romans could also think that this was treason, especially the emperor, for the emperors preferred their godly titles and worship from the people. Another form of possible treason was speaking out against the temple, as mentioned in Matthew 26:59-61 as one of the allegations made against Jesus (Turner 2008:639). However, the chief priests and elders could feel threatened by Jesus, for He has gained a large number of followers. The Jewish leaders also feel threatened by the preaching of Jesus, as well as the miracles He has performed, especially if some of the miracles are done on a Sabbath day.

Matthew 26 begins with the words of Jesus mentioning that His death is coming and that there is a plot against Him in the first two verses. Verse 3 confirms this by mentioning that the high priests and the elders have met with the high priest Caiaphas in order to plot the death of Jesus, which is confirmed by the words εἰς τὴν αὐλὴν τοῦ ἀρχιερέως τοῦ λεγομένου Καϊάφα, “in the courtyard of the high priest Caiaphas.” According to Turner (2008:617), during the Second Temple Period, the position of high priesthood became a political appointment by Rome. Verse 4 further confirms the plot against Jesus, that they want to seize and kill Him, which ties in with the idea that John the Baptist is the forerunner, for he is also seized and then killed. Furthermore, in verse 5 they conclude that the arrest should not happen during the feast, lest there be a riot. Secrecy is needed, for Jesus has become very popular with the crowds of pilgrims that come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival (Turner 2008:617). According to Talbert (2010:286), the timing is everything, and there is no explicit motive given for why they want to kill Jesus. Witherington III (2006:471) mentions that a corpse hanging on a cross on Passover would be defiling. Furthermore, as crucifixion is a form of public shaming, it would be a dishonourable reminder for the Jews that they were not masters of their own fate in Judea (Witherington III 2006:471). Winter (1961:65) adds to this point of crucifixion as a public form of shaming by saying that crucifixion is one of the most degrading and also the most brutal form of executions. To tie in with crucifixion as being degrading and a public form of shaming, one can also reference the notion of *damnatio memoriae*. *Damnatio memoriae* is the damning of the memory. One can incorporate this idea of damning of the memory by executing someone in the most humiliating way possible in order to try and convince people that this person is not worth their admiration and that their memory is not worth remembering.

In Matthew 27, before the crucifixion takes place and after the trial of Jesus, in verses 27-30 He is beaten and scourged. In the verses prior to Matthew 27:33, it is said that Jesus is handed over to the Roman soldiers and scourged and then has to carry His cross, or crossbeam, to the execution site. Scourging before crucifixion or execution was customary, for the scourging would be so intense, as to result in blood loss and the condition of the convicted criminal being weakened (Winter 1961:65). According to Brown (1993:851), the condemned victim was stripped and bound to a low post or pillar in order to be flogged or thrown to the ground. On occasion, the condemned would be flogged as he was on the way to the place of execution, while carrying the crossbeam. There are different objects used to flog the condemned. A freedman would be flogged with rods, military personnel with sticks and others with scourges. Scourges were usually leather thongs that had pieces of bone or spikes attached to the ends (Brown 1993:851). If one is to assume that the scourges were used when the Romans flogged, or scourged, Jesus before He was led to the execution site, it would seem plausible why someone else was asked to carry the cross, or crossbeam, further. The blood loss mentioned by Winter would make more sense if the scourging technique was used. Furthermore, the condemned victim had to carry his own cross to the execution site, was then bound to the cross and then was whipped during the Roman times. Other sources mention that the victim was also stripped and then scourged and had to carry the crossbeam and walked completely nude or partially nude. This all adds up to make the experience even more humiliating than it already was.

According to Turner (2008:660), Matthew provides a few details of the crucifixion over and above the actions of the people and the prophecy being fulfilled. Furthermore, according to the ancient traditions, the site of Golgotha has been identified as the present-day site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In Hebrew and in Aramaic, Golgotha is translated as “skull” and the Latin word for “skull” is *calvaria*, from which the English name “Cavalry” is derived (Turner 2008:660). Matthew 27:33 mentions that Jesus comes to a place called Golgotha, Γολγοθᾶ. Morris (1992:714) claims that there is no evidence that would suggest that Golgotha was a hill and that the crucifixions took place on a hill. Furthermore, Morris (1992:714) suggests that perhaps the skulls from executed criminals were left there, but that is highly unlikely, for the Jews would not allow parts of the bodies to be lying around and unburied. Invading forces would crucify enemies and rebels as a humiliating public spectacle to put a stop to any resistance. Thus, it is assumed that Golgotha was probably close to a well-travelled road that contained many possible witnesses or observers (Turner 2008:660). This is confirmed by verses

39-40 with the mention of passers-by. The execution site was outside the city walls and on well-travelled public roads, which would confirm the idea that Golgotha was outside the city walls and near a well-travelled road, since there were many passers-by.

Verse 34 shows some of the actions taken by the soldiers before they crucified Jesus, ἔδωκαν αὐτῷ πιεῖν οἶνον μετὰ χολῆς μεμιγμένον· καὶ γευσάμενος οὐκ ᾔθέλησεν πιεῖν, “they gave Him wine having been mixed with gall to drink; having tasted (it) He was not willing to drink (it).” This sentence presents the scene where the soldiers give Jesus wine mixed with gall, which He is not willing to drink after tasting it. Witherington III (2006:513) maintains that the fact that Jesus refused the wine after He tasted it was due to the fact that He did not know what kind of wine it was until He tasted it and it also depicts Jesus in all His humanity on the cross. Turner gives two suggestions for the scene with the mixed wine. One suggestion was that it was probably given as a sedative for those who were about to be crucified, and the second suggestion was that the wine was a form of mockery, due to the fact that gall makes the wine very bitter and that this would cause more suffering by making Jesus thirstier (Turner 2008: 660). Morris (1992:715) confirms this second point made by Turner by saying that the mixed wine could be a form of further mockery, but the fact that Jesus refused the wine after tasting it suggests that He preferred to keep His senses undulled. Talbert confirms the first point made by Turner that the wine mixed with gall was used to numb the senses of those who were about to be executed on the cross (2010:303). Morris (1992:715) adds to this custom that it is mentioned in the Talmud that when someone is led to be executed, they are given wine mixed with frankincense in order to numb the senses. Interestingly enough, the wine mixed with gall differs from that in Mark, for Mark wrote that it was wine mixed with myrrh in Mark 15:23. Witherington III adds that myrrh wine was given to lessen the pain as it was also a narcotic. Thus, the myrrh wine would be seen as a form of kindness (Witherington III 2006:513).

Verse 35 shows the guards throwing lots in order to decide who receives which of the belongings of Jesus. At the end of verse 35, there is an insertion of John 19:24, which reads:

Therefore, they said to one another, “Let us not tear it up, but let us cast lots for it whose it will be,” so that the Scripture might be fulfilled that it [said]:

They divided My garments among them

and for My clothing they cast lot.

Therefore, indeed the soldiers did these things.



This insertion is part of the prophecy that was fulfilled, which explains the reason why they divided the garments of Jesus amongst them. According to Talbert (2010:303), the dividing of the garments would suggest that the victims were crucified naked in order to represent the ultimate form of shame. Witherington III (2006:514) adds that if the soldiers even took Jesus' *himation*, He would be left with nothing on, except possibly a loincloth. Cook (2019:418) adds to this by saying that crucifixion was regarded as a miserable death. The casting of lots was over the tunic (mentioned in John 19:23), which was seamless and thus more valuable (Morris 1992:716). The soldiers cast lots for the garments due to the fact that the tunic was more valuable than the other clothes. Nevertheless, as a Roman practice, many were crucified in the nude to further add to the humiliation and shame of being crucified. Nakedness was considered a big issue in Judaism, and perhaps in Jerusalem, there was a compromise to the cultural ethos. The Jewish practice of stoning one to death was that the person was allowed to wear a loincloth, and this could have been the case with Jesus as well (Witherington III 2006:514). This verse is then followed by verse 36, whereafter they finish dividing His garments, they sit down and guard Him. The reason why they are guarding Jesus is to prevent His followers and family to remove Him from the cross and to stop the crucifixion. For if someone removed the victim from the cross, they could be revived (Morris 1992:716). Thus, those on the cross had to be guarded in order to ensure that the family of the victim did not come and take the corpse down to be buried. They also had to be guarded, for if they are still alive on the cross and their wounds were not too severe, a family member could come and take them off the cross and treat their wounds.

Verse 37 contains the accusation as to why Jesus was crucified with words οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." The accusation was written on a *titulus* and fastened on the cross above the head or hung around the neck (Turner 2008:661). Talbert (2010:303) adds to the accusation by saying that it is a "continuation of the parody". The accusation, when hanged around the neck, was visible to all and when the victims were led to the execution site, during which they would be taken on a longer route through the city so that everyone could see the shamed person as well as his crime (Witherington III 2006:514). Furthermore, the fact that there is the phrase "And above His head they put up His accusation having been written" in verse 37 suggests that the cross on which Jesus was crucified was the traditional shaped cross, also known as the *crux immissa*. It was not a stake, or in other words a *crux simplex*, and neither a cross where there is a horizontal beam that rests on top of a vertical beam, also known as *crux commissa* (Turner 2008:661). Witherington III



confirms the fact that the shape of the cross could be the *crux immissa*, for the accusation could be read over the head of Jesus (2006:514).

Turner (2008:662) made the suggestion that the two robbers who were crucified on the right and left side of Jesus are presented to remind the reader of the two disciples who wanted to reign on the right and left side of Jesus. Witherington III (2006:516) claims that the two robbers were regarded as revolutionaries, for theft was not punishable by crucifixion. Talbert maintains that the act of crucifixion was reserved for those deemed by the Romans to be trying to rise too high above their status (2010:303). If a person claimed an unusual status, their cross would be set higher than the others (Talbert 2010:303). From verses 41 to 43, the scribes and head priests mocked Jesus, but they used the third person to address Him rather than addressing Him directly. They ridicule the idea that Jesus has the ability to save others, since He cannot save Himself (Turner 2008:663). Criminals of low status and who were guilty of more than one crime were punished with the most severe forms of punishment, which included crucifixion. Revolutionary activity could also be a reason why these two criminals were punished, for it could be a way for the Roman government to instil fear into the citizens by crucifying them. By crucifying revolutionaries, it could be broadcasted as a general message to the public, saying that anyone else who deems themselves as revolutionaries would suffer the same fate.

Samuelsson (2013:250) states that Jesus was described as being alive while suspended on the cross and that He was suspended ante-mortem, thus making it an execution. It is suspected that Jesus was crucified around midmorning and when He dies around the afternoon during the brightest part of the day from noon to 15h00, there is darkness, as shown in verse 45 (Turner 2008:668). Talbert (2010:304) asserts that the darkness is God mourning His Son, “with whom He is well pleased”. The darkness cannot be explained as an eclipse, for it is the time of Passover, during which eclipse is possible if there is a full moon. Other suggestions are that the darkness was part of a sandstorm, but there are no mentions of sand in the passages (Morris 1992:719). The darkness was not a natural phenomenon, but rather the result of divine intervention, for the three Synoptic texts mention that the darkness was over all the land, but it is suggested that the darkness only covered the land of Israel (Morris 1992:720). The mentioning of the sun and the suspected time that Jesus was crucified would tie in with the fact that crucifixion as an execution method was not quick and took hours or even a few days. The crucifixion can also be described as “The ‘Grand Guignol’ type of death and the holocaust”. However, there is no messenger that reports the death of Jesus. Nevertheless, one can see the

veil in the temple being torn in half as the “messenger” as well as the darkness that came over the land.

There is another insertion after verse 49, and it is believed that the insertion is from John 19:34. However, if one reads the verses before John 19:34, then the insertion makes more sense:

**31** Therefore the Jews, it was (the) Preparation, so that the bodied would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for it was a high day that of Sabbath, Pilate asked that their legs might be broken and they might be taken away. **32** Therefore the soldiers came and indeed broke the legs of the first and of the other having been crucified with Him; **33** however having come to Jesus, when they saw Him having been dead, they did not break His legs, **34** but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out (John 19:31-34).

By looking at John 19:31-34, it shows that bodies are not permitted to be left on the cross on the Sabbath day, so Pilate gives the order that their legs should be broken before they are taken down from the cross. The soldiers come and break the legs of the two robbers, but previously in John 19:30, Jesus “yielded up the spirit,” which would suggest that He is already dead. Thus, when the soldier comes to Jesus, he does not break His legs, but rather pierces His side with a spear and blood and water came pouring out. By inserting this verse of the spear, then Matthew 27:50 makes more sense, for in verse 50, “And Jesus having cried out in a loud voice again gave up (His) Spirit.” It would appear then that Jesus is on the brink of death, but that the spear is the thing that finally killed Him, not the cross on its own. The blood and water that comes pouring out of His side in John 19:34 can be assumed to be from the pierced lung. Samuelsson (2013:251) points out something interesting regarding this insertion of John 19:34 that this is not mentioned in two of the best manuscripts of the New Testament, namely the Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus: Jesus could have been killed by a soldier’s spear instead of by dying on the cross. Witherington III (2006:520) asserts that the fact that Jesus gave up His Spirit was that He gave up His life voluntarily and that it was not taken from Him. Morris (1992:723) states that none of the other Evangelists used the usual ways to show that Jesus died, but rather said that He gave up His spirit, which would set His death apart from the other deaths. Normally, those who were crucified were in a state of absolute exhaustion at the end, but Jesus uttering a loud shout does not fulfil this, supporting the view that He gave up His life voluntarily (Morris 1992:723). The abuse of corpses, especially those of Christians, was customary.

The analysis of the Matthean text regarding the crucifixion of Jesus provides a lot of insight into possible motives for His execution. By looking at Matthew 26, the first motive presented is that of treason. The treason motive includes the fact that the emperor should not be worshipped as a god, which would anger the Romans. It also includes speaking against the temple, which angers the Jewish leaders. The second motive would be anger, for the Jewish leaders are angry that Jesus has gained a large number of followers. The Jewish leaders also felt threatened by Jesus and His preaching, which can be seen as the third motive. However, it would appear that the main motive for the crucifixion of Jesus is fuelled by anger, which leads to His arrest, trial and execution. The crucifixion is a judicial execution, in the sense that there was a trial and it was done in a legal context. The crucifixion, or killing itself, is perceived as murder based on the definition of murder being inhumanely, barbaric and wickedly. Nonetheless, even though anger is the main motivator and motive for the execution of Jesus, the execution itself is uncalled for and can be classified as pettiness. Even though the motives seem to be valid, in many cases it is petty. With regards to *damnatio memoriae*, the Jewish leaders and even the Romans try to ‘damn’ the memory of Jesus with the crucifixion and erase Him from the memories of His followers. However, the Gospels can be seen as a method of keeping the memory of Jesus alive and letting it live on. In order to determine more motives for the crucifixion of Jesus, the crucifixion scene in Luke will follow the Matthew text.

### **2.3. Introduction to Luke**

According to Carson and Moo (2005:198), the Gospel of Luke is the longest book in the New Testament. Similar to the Gospel of Matthew, Luke also follows the ministry of Jesus in the form of a basic outline that was established by Mark (Carson & Moo 2005:198). Luke is the only book of the synoptic gospels that contains a preface which explains why he writes and also explains the state of the tradition which he has inherited (Holladay 2005:223). With regards to the crucifixion scene, Luke breaks off from the narrative pattern set out by Mark and followed mostly by Matthew. Although Luke follows his predecessors closely, he still adds his own bits to the narrative (Carson & Moo 2005:201). There is a wide variety of early papyri of Luke available (Hernández Jr 2012:121). This wide variety of early papyri of Luke showcases an outstanding transmission (Hernández Jr 2012:138). Similar to Mark, Luke is also not one of the original Twelve Apostles and also considered not to be an apostle, but he also wrote the gospel based on the eyewitness testimonies of others (Beale & Gladd 2020:99).

Scholars tend to agree on the fact that both Luke and Acts were written by the same author. There are various factors that link the two books with one another, namely the prologues,

language, style and theology that suggest common authorship (Carson & Moo 2005:203). It is also considered possible that the author was a Greek-speaking Christian living outside of Palestine. Furthermore, the most striking difference between this gospel and the other gospels is the fact that the Gospel of Luke is considered to be the first volume of a set of two and that the second volume is Acts (Ehrman 2017:96). Luke was also considered to be a Gentile (Beale & Gladd 2020:99). There is both internal and external evidence that suggests that Luke the doctor and the friend of Paul is the author (Carson & Moo 2005: 203). However, this comes back to the discussion surrounding the possible dates for Mark, and if one is to date Mark in the early 60s CE, then Luke can be dated to either mid-60s CE or late 60s CE (Carson & Moo 2005: 210).

As mentioned above, the crucifixion scene is found in the four gospels and the Gospel of Luke is one of them. The crucifixion will also be analysed and discussed in Luke, along with the Gospel of Matthew.

### **2.3.1. Luke 22:1-2 & 23: 26-49: The crucifixion of Jesus**

According to Green (1997:752), The Festival of Unleavened Bread, as mentioned in Luke 22:1, was one of the pilgrim festivals. This festival and Passover were celebrated separately, but during the time of Jesus, they were celebrated together (Green 1997:752). All the Gospels seem to agree that the crucifixion took place on a Friday in the Passover season, but the problem lies with whether the Passover corresponded with the Lord's Supper or with the crucifixion itself (Morris 1988:330). The plot to kill Jesus is made clear in verse 2, where the high priests and the scribes are thinking of ways to kill Jesus, but also not cause a riot among the people and His followers. Johnson (1991:332) adds to this that the high priests and scribes did not want to cause a riot with the arrest of Jesus, for the crowd was quite large, with around two and a half million people, which he bases on the account of Josephus. Johnson (1991:332) continues remarking on the writings of Josephus, who mentions that these crowds on such feasts were considered to be quite unpredictable and prone to violence.

In Luke 23:26, it is mentioned that "they" led Jesus away and that "they" signifies the unity of Rome, the Jewish leaders, and the Jewish people in hostility against Jesus (Green 1997:811). The "they" that led Jesus away is considered to be ambiguous, and there are some scholars who have argued that the Jewish people, along with their leaders, are responsible for the crucifixion (Green 1997:814). Further along in verse 26, "they" took hold of a man coming from the countryside, Simon of Cyrene, and had him carry Jesus' cross to the execution site. Luke keeps

this section from Mark 15:20 (Johnson 1991:372). According to Green (1997:813), Luke tries to remind his audience of “cross-bearing as integral to discipleship,” for Jesus has said multiple times that the disciples should pick up their cross and follow Him. Johnson (1991:374) confirms to this point that the fact that Simon of Cyrene had to carry the cross, and he carried it behind Jesus, which was an act of discipleship. The cross that is mentioned in verse 26 could refer to the crossbeam, which was then carried to the place of execution (Green 1997: 814). Morris (1988:354) adds to this by saying that it was customary for the victim to carry either his own cross or the crossbeam to the execution site. Luke also tries to remind the audience that, even though this man, Simon of Cyrene, could be Jewish, and came from the countryside means that he was not involved in the riot that led to Jesus being executed and that the Jewish hostility was not universal (Green 1997:815). The fact that Simon of Cyrene had to carry the cross, or crossbeam, means that Jesus was quite weakened and was not able to carry the cross or crossbeam all the way to the execution site. This weakened state could be due to the prior scourging which was customary before execution.

Furthermore, with regards to the speech that Jesus made directed at the women mourning for Him in verses 28-31, Green (1997:813-814) asserts that they should not mourn for Jesus, but rather mourn for Jerusalem, who have failed to recognise the time of God’s gracious emergence that has led to the rejection of the Messiah. Johnson (1991:375) adds here to the speech that Jesus makes to the women where Luke portrays Jesus as the sage and the prophet, by saying that even though He is on His way to be executed, He still turns around and delivers “a sombre prediction”. Morris (1988:355) also adds that even though Jesus is being led to His death, He is not thinking of Himself at that moment, but rather about the women and the people mourning for Him.

In verse 32, it is mentioned that two other criminals are to be put to death. In verse 33, they arrive ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Κρανίον, “to the place called the Skull”, where Jesus and the two criminals are crucified. Green (1997:819) adds to the name of the execution site that the name “the Skull” has appalling connotations. Interestingly enough, Luke omits the Hebrew name of the execution site, which is called Golgotha (Johnson 1991:376). It is not certain why the place was called the Skull, whether it is a reference to the shape of the hill or the rock pinnacles (Green 1997:819). This would tie in with the idea that the execution site was outside the city walls. As mentioned in verse 33, they arrive at the execution site, which means that they have had to walk for a while before arriving there. Thus, by referring to the previous

chapter, it can be assumed that Jesus and the two other criminals have to walk through the city as part of the humiliating walk and make sure that they attract a crowd to watch the execution.

The exact method of crucifixion is not mentioned in detail. Luke also omits the part with the wine having been mixed with myrrh or gall, as is found in Mark 15:23 and Matthew 27:34. Furthermore, the crucifixion account is kept quite brief by the Evangelists, for none specify the exact method that was used to fasten Jesus to the cross, how the cross was erected and what other methods were used (Johnson 1991:376). It is suspected that Jesus's hands and most likely His feet were nailed to the cross, if one takes John 20:25 into account (Morris 1988:356). Johnson adds further that crucifixion was considered to be one of the worst forms of execution, for it combined torture and slow asphyxiation due to the fact that the body could not be pulled up due to the pain and also fatigue and not being able to fill the lungs with air (1991:376). It is not mentioned what the accusations are of these two criminals, but their punishment could refer to the fact that they were considered to be a threat to the state or perhaps even deemed as dangerous and violent men (Green 1997:819). According to Johnson (1991:376), the Greek word used to describe the two criminals, which is *κακούργους*, is quite a generic term, which means "one who is malefactor". Thus, it would suggest that these two criminals were of low status and possibly guilty of more than one crime.

In verse 34, "they" were casting lots in order to divide the clothing of Jesus, and Green (1997:820) adds to this by saying that to be stripped of one's clothing indicated complete indignity and also the loss of personal identity. Johnson (1991:376) mentions that Luke uses the Greek word *διαμεριζόμενοι*, which is a participle that expresses purpose. The purpose section could be seen with the casting of lots in order to divide the garments, for the soldiers had this purpose in mind to obtain something of the victim's possessions. Due to the condemned being stripped before he was fastened to the crossbeam, his possession would go to the ones who were guarding the condemned. However, as mentioned above under subheading 2.2.1, it was thought that due to the Jewish beliefs the condemned was crucified while wearing a loincloth instead of complete nudity. A further form of mocking is shown in verse 36, where the soldiers offer Jesus sour wine. Green (1997:821) maintains that this action is similar to that of Psalm 69:21, where giving vinegar to drink was a sign of insult. The wine that the soldiers offered Jesus in verse 36 could also be seen as the drugged wine that was given to the victims in order to numb their senses, but Jesus refused to drink the wine. However, the sour wine was a form of the soldiers' mocking of Jesus (Morris 1988:357). In verse 38, it mentions that an inscription was placed over Jesus, and from the Roman perspective this would

be deemed false, as both Pilate and Herod rejected the fact that Jesus was the king of the Jews (Green 1997:821).

An interesting point made regarding the two criminals is that one of them joins Rome and Jerusalem in slandering and mocking Jesus in verse 39; however, the other one rebukes him and asks that Jesus should remember him when He enters into His kingdom in verse 40-42. According to Green, the second criminal is the first one to recognise that the death of Jesus is not a contradiction of His messiahship and the first one to recognise that the crucifixion of Jesus was the forerunner to His enthronement (Green 1997:822-823). Furthermore, Johnson (1991:378) adds that the second criminal is expressing a version of the Lord's Prayer.

The death scene of Jesus is set in three parts in verses 44-45. The first part was that the moment was the sixth hour, and darkness came over the land and lasted until the ninth hour. Morris adds here that the sixth hour refers to noon (1988:359). The hours that are mentioned in the text would present the idea that the crucifixion was not a quick execution, but that it lasted for hours and could even last for days. By mentioning the sixth hour, it can be suggested that by this time Jesus has already been on the cross for a few hours. The second part mentions darkness again by pointing out the fact that the sun is now darkened, and the third part is the tearing of the veil of the temple into two sections. Green (1997:826) remarks that it is important to note that even though the land is covered in darkness, God is still present, and the death of Jesus is not seen as contradicting but rather helps to fulfil the divine purpose. In verse 46, Jesus says just before He dies that He is committing His Spirit and breaths His last breath. The Greek word used for the "breathed" is ἐξέπνευσεν, which, according to Johnson (1991:380), can also be translated as "exhale," but rather the remarkable point that Luke makes here is that it also accentuates the self-control Jesus had, for He said His prayer in verse 46 and then died. Morris (1988:360) asserts that in verse 46, the last words of Jesus "are a beautiful expression of trust as he commends himself to the Father". In other words, Jesus knew that He was not alone in His final moment before death and gave His fate over to the Father as a form of trust that this was the right thing to do. Furthermore, Morris (1988:360) adds that none of the other Gospels explicitly say that Jesus dies, but rather that He breathed His last or gave up His Spirit, which would suggest further that His death was indeed something most unusual.

By comparing the crucifixion scenes found in the four Gospels, one can see clear similarities between the four different accounts. However, there are also clear differences between the found accounts. In Luke, it is the scribes who were planning to kill Jesus and not the high



priests and scribes or elders, as mentioned in both Mark and Matthew. There appears to be no mention of the plot to kill Jesus in John. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke they mention that the arrest should not happen during Passover and the feast of the Unleavened Bread in case a riot breaks out. In the three Gospels, it was mentioned that they feared the people. In both Matthew and Mark, it shows that Pilate delivered Jesus so that He might be crucified, but in Luke and John Pilate delivers Jesus to “them”, which would suggest that He is delivered to the high priests and the Jews, who then crucify Him. Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention that Simon of Cyrene helps to carry the cross, whereas John says that Jesus carries His own cross. Matthew, Mark and John say that they arrived at a place called Golgotha, which is called the Place of the Skull, whereas in Luke it only says that they arrived at a place called the Skull. With regards to the accusation sign, there are differences as well in the wording. In Matthew the wording is “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” In Mark it says, “This is the King of the Jews.” Luke says, “This (is) the King of the Jews.” And finally, in John it says, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” John is also the only Gospel that mentions that the accusation is written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The interesting point regarding the accusation is that all four Gospels mention “King of the Jews”; however, the differences are in the additional wording that some Gospels have. Mark and Luke do not have any additional wording, whereas Matthew and John have Jesus’ name beforehand. With regards to the hours and darkness and also the tearing of the veil into two pieces, it is mentioned in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but there is no mention found in John of the tearing of the veil in the temple. There is also no mention in John of the sixth and ninth hours or the darkness covering the land. When Jesus dies, none of the Gospels explicitly say that Jesus died or use the word “died”. All four Gospels use very significant words to describe His passing. Matthew says that He gave up His Spirit and John says that He yielded up the spirit. Mark and Luke say that He breathes His last. At first glance it would appear that the four Gospels do not have that many differences; however, upon a deeper reading the differences appear. There are not a lot of differences, nor does it change the narrative, but it lies in certain details, for instance the plot to kill Jesus which is omitted in John.

The analysis of Luke text regarding the crucifixion of Jesus provides valuable insight into possible motives for His execution and also presents the opportunity to distinguish between motives and ulterior motives. By looking at Luke 22, one can derive that a possible motive for the execution of Jesus is jealousy. However, one can also say that anger is a motive, for the scribes are angry that Jesus has gained a large number of followers and that He does not fit their “norm.” The scribes also dislike the preaching of Jesus. Furthermore, by looking closely



at Luke 23, the accusation given to Pilate as to why Jesus must be executed is that He stirred up the people which could lead to a rebellion, as seen in verse 14, and before this verse it is said in verse 5 that Jesus stirs up the people with His teachings as He travels. This adds to the jealousy motive, but it also shows a motive of fear, for the scribes fear that which they do not understand. This feeling of fear can also fuel their anger, for people would rather listen to the teachings of Jesus and follow Him than come to the high priests. *Damnatio memoriae* also plays a role here, for the soldiers and the Jewish leaders tried their best to destroy the memory of Jesus; however, as mentioned above under subheading 2.2.1, the Gospels can be seen keeping the memory of Jesus alive. The consequences of the death of Jesus can be seen with the stoning of Stephen, which will be discussed in the following section.

#### **2.4. Introduction to Acts**

As mentioned above in the section about the Gospel of Luke, the Book of Acts, or in other words the Acts of the Apostles, is connected to the Gospel of Luke. It is most likely that Luke did not give this book a title and only when the gospel was separated from this book did the need for the title arise. Several authors from the second and third century gave suggestions for a name for this book; however, the name that would remain was “The Acts of the Apostles,” which first appeared in the anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke and also in Irenaeus (Carson & Moo 2005:285). It is said that the word “Acts” is derived from the Greek word *πράξεις*, which is translated as “act or deed.” In the case of the Acts of the Apostles, the word “Acts” indicates an acknowledgement of the genre or subgenre of the ancient world, which are books that characterise the great deeds of people or those of the cities (Carson & Moo 2005:285). The book of Acts is different from the other books, for there is no unaccompanied individual that is the main character of the book; however, it outlines the history of Christianity from the time of the resurrection of Jesus to Paul being under house arrest for two years in Rome (Ehrman 2017:169). It is also considered that Luke and Acts form a two-set volume, since it is generally believed that both books were written by the same author. Nonetheless, if both books are part of a set, then both must be part of the same genre. However, the book of Acts is quite different from Luke and both are structured differently. For the book of Acts is more concerned with the historical progress of the Christian church and that the narrative is settled within a chronological framework that starts with the origin of the movement. By looking at this, it would seem that Acts is more closely connected to other texts that are classified as histories that were composed in antiquity (Ehrman 2017:169). Thus, it would appear that the book of Acts can be classified as ancient historiography (Beale & Gladd 2020:152). There are only a

small number of early manuscripts of Acts that have survived and all are papyri. The surviving manuscripts are also, unfortunately, fragmentary. The single pages also contain holes, with most of the pages only covering a small bit of the text (Tuckett 2012:157).

As stated in section 2.3, both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are anonymous, and it can be concluded that the author of both these two texts was well educated, not one of the original apostles or a disciple of Christ, but someone who could have been part of some of the events that are narrated in the texts. This unknown author also has sufficient knowledge regarding the Old Testament in the Greek Septuagint version as well as exceptional knowledge regarding the political and social circumstances in the middle of the first century CE. The author also has great admiration for the apostle Paul (Carson & Moo 2005:290). One could also argue that Acts should be dated before Nero started to persecute the Christians in Rome in 64-65 CE. During the time before Nero, Rome had more enthusiasm towards the church, and this optimism is reflected in Acts. Therefore, the arguments made suggest that Acts should rather be dated in the early or mid-60s (Carson & Moo 2005:298). Around the time that Acts was written, which was most likely around the end of the first century, the Jesus movement had spread far and wide, even beyond Palestine (Holladay 2005:320).

#### **2.4.1. Acts 7:1, 54-58 & 8:1: The stoning of Stephen**

The stoning of Stephen marks the beginning of the persecution of the church and the Christians, and he is considered to be the first martyr. Compared to the other murders, for instance the crucifixion which appears in all four Gospels, the stoning of Stephen only appears in the Book of Acts. There is very little information regarding stoning and the death of Stephen compared to the beheading of John the Baptist and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Acts 7:54 shows the reactions of the hearers of Stephen's speech, and their reactions suggest that they were quite upset and angry. This sentence in verse 54, Ἀκούοντες δὲ ταῦτα διεπρίοντο ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν καὶ ἔβρυχον τοὺς ὀδόντας ἐπ' αὐτόν, shows the extent of their emotions. They were not only "cut in their hearts," but they also "began gnashing their teeth at him." According to Bruce (1990:210), this is a sign of their frustration, as they found Stephen's speech to be "the last straw", and it was more than they could tolerate. The hearers were moved to an even greater rage after listening to the speech by Stephen (Barrett 1994:382). Johnson (1992:139) adds to the gnashing of teeth by saying that this phrase is used to describe those who are excluded from the kingdom. According to Kyle (2001:260), martyrologists claim that people who are gnashing on their teeth are near the verge of cannibalism. Kyle (2001:260) then

quotes a scholar by the name of Tannahill, who claims that cannibalism can be seen as a reaction to hatred and also the ultimate vengeance. However, since there are societies that ban cannibalism, in order to get rid of these emotions of hatred and wanting the ultimate vengeance, the destruction of the body and the denial of burial was seen as an outlet for these emotions. Thus, as is seen in Acts 7:8-60, the members of the council “ground their teeth with fury” at Stephen (Kyle 2001:260).

Verse 55 and 56 describes what Stephen saw in the heavens and said it out loud, which resulted in his hearers becoming upset again in verse 57. As stated by Dunn (1996:99), stories of martyrs usually focus on the martyr’s persistence under suffering; however, with verses 55-56, it shows that Stephen shares the privilege of visionaries and prophets. Verse 57 begins with the sentence κράξαντες δὲ φωνῇ μεγάλῃ συνέσχον τὰ ὄτα αὐτῶν καὶ ὤρμησαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν, which reads in translation as “And having cried out in a loud voice they held their ears and rushed with one accord upon him.” According to Bruce, these words may give the idea that Stephen is the victim of lynch law, but it would appear that this is not the case once verse 58 is read, where Stephen is cast out of the city and then stoned (1990:211). Talbert (2005:65) also mentions that what has started as a trial comes very close to a “spontaneous lynching” and that stoning often made use of the lynch law. Barrett (1994: 385) asserts that the council is angered by that which Stephen sees and does not want to listen to anything he has to say. Dunn (1996:100) claims that Luke describes the crowd with a single mind in order to capture their determined hostility. The crowd is seen as a single mind and therefore one rejection (Johnson 1992:140). Furthermore, Bruce (1990:211) asserts that by looking at verse 58, the execution of Stephen was done in agreement with the judicial procedure. Dunn (1996:101) adds to this by saying that stoning would be an appropriate form of punishment for blasphemy; however, the execution is not demonstrated as a legally justified act. Bruce states that there have been various attempts made to try and explain why there were no Roman prefects mentioned in this section. One reason given this scene takes place after the departure of Pilate in *circa* 36/37 CE, but this was proven not to be the case, for the legate of Syria made sure that there was no interregnum, and it would also have been illegal for a high priest and Sanhedrin to authorise an execution. He mentioned that there could be one possibility, which is that the charge against Stephen was proved, in other words the charge of speaking against the temple, and that this offence under the Roman administration states that the Jewish authorities had the right to exercise capital jurisdiction (Bruce 1990:212). Stoning was used in Ancient Greece on those the people considered were causing harm to the community. By using that background information, it

would appear to the reader that the Sanhedrin and the community felt that Stephen was harming the community by speaking out against the temple. The fact that the audience of Stephen dragged him outside in order to stone him can be seen as Death through ambush, as stated by R. Sri Pathmanathan (1965:8). The audience dragging him outside can be seen as a form of an ambush, especially if it happened suddenly and without Stephen knowing that he was about to die.

Further along in verse 58, it mentions οἱ μάρτυρες, “the witnesses.” Johnson (1992:140) states that “the witnesses” here are identified as false witnesses, since the witnesses strip their clothing and not the clothes of the one about to be condemned to death. Bruce (1990:212) mentions here that it was the duty of the witnesses to take the leading part in the execution. At the place of stoning, there was a drop that was twice the height of a man. The first witness will push the culprit from behind so that he falls face downward and is then turned over onto his back. If he managed to die from the fall, it will be adequate. However, if he is still alive, the second witness will take a stone and drop it onto the culprit’s heart. If he dies of this, then it will be adequate. However, if he managed to survive this, then the entire congregation of Israel will pick up stones and stone him (Bruce 1990:212). This information regarding the procedure of stoning a criminal is found in Sanhedrin 6.1-4, and there is no mention of this procedure in Acts (Barrett 1994:386). It is suggested that, as stated in verse 58, where “the witnesses laid aside their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul,” that according to the Mishnaic regulation, it was the clothes of the criminal that had to be placed four cubits from the place of stoning. However, it would appear that Luke thought differently, and that Saul guarded the clothes of the executioners (Bruce 1990:212). Verse 59, with the words “and (as) they were stoning Stephen,” would suggest that it was a repeated action by means of either emphasising the stoning or that many took part in the act of stoning (Bruce 1990:212). Stoning was seen as social justice, and a large crowd needed to take part in order for the stoning to be effective. The large crowd taking part was also seen as a controlled form of social justice. Thus, it is not mentioned how many people are taking part in the stoning of Stephen, but it is assumed that there are a number of people involved in this stoning.

Acts 8:1 mentions that Saul was present at the execution and that he was consenting to the killing of Stephen. Bruce asserts that this does not mean that Saul was part of the Sanhedrin, but rather that he is there in the capacity of a herald who is there to announce that the convicted person is about to be executed for the prescribed offence (Bruce 1990:214). Furthermore, in Acts 8:1, it mentions the consequence of the death of Stephen, which was a great persecution

against the church. It is suggested that the unconventional teachings of Stephen gave the chief priests and those associated the opportunity to stir the people against the disciples. After the death of Stephen, the new movement started by those who were close to him, could be seen as hostile to the temple authorities (Bruce 1990:214). It would appear that those who fled from the city were the Hellenist Christians, for they are easily identifiable compared to the other citizens of the city (Johnson 1992:141).

According to Carson and Moo (2005:287), the section regarding Stephen, Samaria and also Saul, is the depiction of the church and how it come in tension with the boundaries of traditional Judaism. Stephen is charged with the crime of speaking against the temple and the law, and when brought before the Sanhedrin, he makes the claim that the revelation of God cannot be limited to one place and in turn accuses the Sanhedrin of resisting the Holy Spirit (Carson & Moo 2005:287). The revolutionary standpoint of Stephen sparks opposition to the young Christian movement, which forces everyone except the apostles to leave Jerusalem (Carson & Moo 2005:287).

By looking at this extract regarding the execution of Stephen, a few motives come to light. In the beginning, it appears that possible motives would be both anger and hate. Anger and hate would stem from what Stephen was saying, especially since he mentions that he saw “the heavens having been opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God” in Acts 7:56. This revelation, or declaration, upset the people further, since this happened after the crucifixion of Jesus, when the people rejected Him. Their reaction in Acts 7:57 can be seen as a second rejection. The anger and hate motive can also be seen in Acts 7:54 in the first reaction of Stephen’s audience. However, with the execution of Stephen their anger and hate are taken too far, resulting in an execution that was uncalled for, especially via stoning. One can say that his death was uncalled for in that even if a legal procedure was involved, the execution of Stephen could still be classified as petty. It was not necessary to execute him, especially if he was speaking the truth. With this in mind, the stoning can be seen as quasi-judicial and extra-judicial execution, as there was no legal authority present. The way in which the stoning happened can be seen as a malicious, unlawful killing. His audience’s reactions show pure pettiness, especially since they place their hands over their ears like that of a child not wanting to listen.

### 3. Summary

By looking at the three deaths found in the New Testament, namely John the Baptist, Jesus and Stephen, it is determined that these deaths were murders. It is also determined that these murders were committed due to various motives and also one ulterior motive. The common motives found for all three murders were those of anger and hate. There were also other motives, for instance fear in the case of John the Baptist and treason and jealousy in the case of Jesus. However, anger appears to have been as the main motivator in all three of the murders. It was also found, with the murder of Jesus, that another factor plays a role, *damnatio memoriae*, the damning of the memory. It was determined that the crucifixion of Jesus was meant to erase His memory from the minds of the people and to erase His memory from those times. However, even though the Jewish leaders and the Romans were determined to try to damn the memory of Jesus, the Gospels were trying to preserve His memory through the accounts of His life, teachings, death and resurrection.

John the Baptist's beheading appears not only in Mark but also in Matthew and Luke. The account in Matthew is very similar to the account in Mark, but the account in Luke differs, for it is much shorter and does not contain the beheading scene. In comparison, the account of the crucifixion of Jesus appears in the four Gospels, namely Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There are subtle differences in the accounts of the four Gospels, for instance the plot to kill Jesus not being mentioned in John. However, the differences do not change the narrative or appear to have a large impact on the reception of the crucifixion. The crucifixion stays a compelling narrative in the Gospels, for it shows the intense emotions of the Jews and Pharisees as well as the anguish of the followers of Jesus. The account of the stoning only appears in the Book of Acts, but this account also shows the intense emotions of the scribes and the members of the Sanhedrin.

Nonetheless, even though there are authentic motives behind these murders, the ulterior motive seems to be stronger and can be seen as the real reason for why these murders are committed. The ulterior motive is that of pettiness. With regards to all three murders, each one appears to be that of a petty murder. The murders are uncalled for and unnecessary, and can be seen as the most extreme form of anger and hate. However, the actions of the ones committing the murder or giving the order for the murder to be committed can be seen as petty. Thus, to conclude, although these murders are presented as executions based on the background study of the previous chapter, and there are motives present for each murder, they are still presented as petty murders that can be deemed as to be for.

## 4. A Deathly Play

### Murder in Ancient Greek and Latin Tragedies

#### 1. Introduction

Henrichs (2000:173) begins his article with wise words, which is that Greek tragedies are not for the faint-hearted, especially since they will be permeated by blood and corpses are scattered throughout. Tragedies were written for the entertainment of the people. However, since Greek tragedies were written and performed by men, it was seen to be aimed at a large public crowd mainly consisting of men (Foley 2001:3). Tragedies mostly contain a death scene of some of the characters. However, the death scene is usually preceded by a build-up of suspense. Ohlander states that there are two forms of suspense found in tragedies. The first form of suspense is uncertainty, where the audience does not know what will happen next (Ohlander 1989:9). The second form of suspense is where the audience either knows what will happen next or is fairly certain what will happen next but is moved by anticipation of the actual occurrence (Ohlander 1989:10). Most of the time, the storylines of the tragedies contained a few facts from events that took place or from history. For instance, one play written by Euripides took place before the Greeks embarked on their journey to Troy and before the beginning of the Trojan War, which is the play called *Iphigeneia at Aulis*. This tragedy can be seen as the ‘catalyst’ for *Agamemnon*, as Iphigeneia’s death leads to Agamemnon’s death.

Allen states the difference between retribution and revenge in a very clear way, that retribution takes place when a wrong is committed, but revenge takes place when an injury or harm or slight is committed, and revenge does not need to take place when a wrong is necessarily committed. Furthermore, revenge is considered to be a very personal action (Allen 2000:18). By looking at the tragedies, revenge does seem to play a role in the planning and execution of the murders, and it would appear that there is a deep personal connection involved in the act of revenge.

The tragedies will be compared to one another and will be further analysed by using the information stated in Chapter 2. This comparison will help determine the motive behind the murders or whether these murders can be classified as petty. Even though the tragedies are the same, in other words, there are two tragedies named *Agamemnon* and two named *Medea*, they were written by different authors. The first section, which is the section about the Greek



tragedies, is also the section with the tragedies written by the original author, namely Aeschylus and Euripides. The second section, which is the section about the Latin tragedies, contains the tragedies that were translated by Seneca from Greek into Latin. There are considerable differences between the Greek and Latin version of the tragedies, which could have an impact on the motive as well as the analysis.

## **2. Murder in Greek Tragedies**

Murder, and also death, in Greek tragedies are explained in a lot of detail, for most deaths would take place off-stage or somewhere else. Thus, most of the time the deaths are reported by a messenger who has witnessed it and then relays it on stage to the receiver and also to the audience. Henrichs adds that the victims in the tragedies who are removed by means of deadly force are not just murdered, done away with, or killed (2000:174). Rather, the tragedians would use words such as “slaughtered” or “sacrificed” to describe their untimely and brutal passing (Henrichs 2000:174).

Interestingly enough, with regard to the tragedies that will be discussed in this chapter, the murderer is a woman. Yeames used a quote from a play written by William Congreve, namely *The Mourning Bride*, which is “hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” (1913:193). He used this quote to describe Medea and another character, Phaedra, as an example “of the remorse and madness that came from the failure of character, from the consciousness of pride humiliated by the lowering of ideals, by faithlessness to duty” (Yeames 1913:193). Yeames has mentioned two things here that are applicable to these tragedies. The first thing is the quote from another play. This quote can be understood as the anger of a woman should not be underestimated, especially if she feels wronged or rejected. This will be brought to light in the analysis of the tragedies. The second thing is how Yeames uses this quote to describe two female characters in Greek tragedies. As stated by him, the anger comes from the character failing, pride being taken away due to ideals being lowered and duty being neglected. Remorse does not appear to play a role in these tragedies, as it would appear that remorse is not present after the murders. However, the female characters in these tragedies are humiliated in different ways, but there is the same core problem in that they feel ignored and rejected. Their duty, in other words being the perfect wife that takes care of the house, is long neglected due to their husbands having wronged them. Eidinow (2016:71) adds to the idea of envy by saying it is called φθόρος, which is translated as “ill-will, malice, envy or jealousy,” and that φθόρος is a “virulent, powerful, toxic force”. In other words, envy, or φθόρος, is a bitter hostile emotion to

have and that it can be quite powerful, depending on how it is used. Johnston adds to this by saying that Medea has spent her life in exile and wandering from city to city because she rejects “the proper female roles of dutiful daughter, submissive wife, and nurturing mother” (2013:222). The marriages of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon and Jason and Medea are considered to be troubled marriages, as they are portrayed as such by the tragedians. These troubled marriages also cause brutal and unfortunate deaths (Hall 2010:126).

By continuing on the idea of anger, Allen (2000:50) states that in oratory, anger is the main reason given by orators to explain why the city or a person tries to punish or wishes to punish someone. This notion of anger also plays a role in the tragedies, for it would appear that this emotion is also the main motivator for the murders, along with revenge. Furthermore, Allen (2000:78) describes anger as a disease, saying that the tragic characters often suffer from this disease of anger. The punishers in the tragedies use punishment not only to cure their anger but also to verify their personal authority (Allen 2000:86).

## 2.1. Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*<sup>51</sup>

Aeschylus was born *circa* 525 BCE and competed in many competitions for tragedies, of which he won at least twelve (Hall 2010:198). The time Aeschylus started writing his tragedies was not at the very beginning of the Athenian tragic theatre but was close enough for him to be considered a founding figure (Burian 2023:1). *Agamemnon* is part of a tetralogy, for which Aeschylus won a competition. Unfortunately, only three of his four tragedies have survived and the final satyr tragedy, *Proteus*, has not been preserved. The tetralogy, known as the *Oresteia*, was composed *circa* 458 BCE (Hall 2010:210). The *Oresteia* was the last production of Aeschylus in Athens in 458 BCE. Additionally, most of Aeschylus’ productions are coupling tetralogies, which consist of three tragedies that follow one another in a successive storyline and the fourth play would be a satyr-play that was based on the same or related myth (Sommerstein 2012:26). According to Debnar (2005:10), in the trilogy of tragedies written by Aeschylus, namely the *Oresteia*, the conflicts and resolution found in these three tragedies “are strongly colored by the difficulties the Athenians were facing in the 450’s: clashes with the Persians, the First Peloponnesian War, and political upheavals within their own city”. Furthermore, regarding the tragedy named *Agamemnon*, there is a feature found which is the poet’s use of naval power and protracted warfare conducted in distant lands as a metaphor for a pervasion of natural order and a threat to the political stability in Argos” (Debnar 2005:10).

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<sup>51</sup> Translation used for Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* is by D. Mulroy.

Aeschylus' tragedies and the plots of the storyline tend to be characterised not by an abrupt change of direction, but rather by building up tension as well as an expectation towards the climax that is anticipated by the audience if not by the dramatic performances (Sommerstein 2012:27).

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is set after the Trojan War, with Agamemnon returning to his house in Argos and to his wife, Clytemnestra who governed the city in his absence (Hall 2010:211). However, the reunion would not be considered a happy reunion, for not only is Agamemnon returning with a prisoner of war and mistress named Cassandra, but Clytemnestra is also still holding a grudge against him for sacrificing their daughter, Iphigeneia, to Artemis in order to have wind for the sails before sailing to Troy. Cassandra is also seen as a captive female slave and in the beginning. Clytemnestra appears to sympathize with her situation; however she turns unsympathetic when she fails to persuade Cassandra to talk (Wallace 2023:20). Clytemnestra also has a lover, Aegisthus, who is the cousin of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra combines adultery and the deceitful murder of Agamemnon and becomes the representation of the biggest threat to the cultural system that a wife is capable of being. In other words, she performs a crime in honour of revenge for her child who was sacrificed, and becomes detached from the rest of her children, which brings her maternal role into question (Foley 2001:201).

The fact that Clytemnestra plans her revenge for years is quite unusual in a tragedy, for most of the time the tragic characters act more swiftly rather than waiting and planning for the perfect moment to strike (Hall 2010:68). Eidinow (2016:309) points out something interesting regarding the descriptive words used for Cassandra. In Greek texts there is a word, namely *agurtes*, and other related terms that were used to allude to beggars. However, by the fifth century, these terms were used to describe "itinerant sellers of ritual practices of various kinds" and became a term of abuse. Nonetheless, the earliest instance where the terms were used that linked both beggary and ritual practice with one another was in *Agamemnon*, and it is used by Cassandra (Eidinow 2016:309). Foley refers to another scholar in reference to Clytemnestra, namely Patterson. Patterson identified that tragedy accentuates the connection between adultery, for instance Clytemnestra, and a public death. Adultery results in violence and the whole household being corrupted (Foley 2001:85). Furthermore, the tragic adultery gives rise to *stasis*<sup>52</sup> that expands from the *oikos* to the *polis*, and the tragic action exploits the vital importance of marriage, the primary connection between the private and the public worlds

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<sup>52</sup> Definition according to LSJ. *Stasis* translated means "civil conflict".  
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=stasis&la=greek#lexicon>

(Foley 2001:85). In other words, tragic adultery affects not only the household and the private world, but also spreads out into the city and the public world. Thus, it affects more people than only those in the household. The fact that Clytemnestra held a grudge for this long already points in the direction that the murder may be due to pettiness.

Wallace (2023:22) asserts that Clytemnestra's portrayal in the tragedy appears to be explosive. The following words by Clytemnestra are seen to be quite an odd choice of words, for the metaphor of the fishing net can be considered to be quite striking. It is not a metaphor normally used to describe someone who has gained many wounds in battles.

If he'd received as many wounds as word thereof came streaming home, he'd be more like a fishing net, with nothing left but holes. To die as often as they said he did, would take a triple-bodies Geryon [...] (Aesch. Ag. 866-870).

Clytemnestra greets Agamemnon at the door upon his arrival. Her welcoming speech to Agamemnon gives away her fixation on the murder that she has been planning for years (Porter 2023:122). This suggests that she is the one in control of the house and does not come across as the typical wife in a subordinate role (Foley 2001:208). Clytemnestra persuades Agamemnon to enter the palace while walking on a richly coloured carpet (Hall 2010:211). Hall (2010:214) asserts here that Agamemnon's self-agreement to walk on the carpet in order to enter the palace "betrays an arrogance that comes uncomfortably close to sacrilege. Putting carpets instead of shoe leather between his feet and the earth has metaphysical ramifications". In other words, Agamemnon and his self-agreement is being honoured very highly and he walks like a god on the carpet. Instead of honouring the gods, his actions can bring forth divine displeasure (Levine 2015:259). Furthermore, by removing his shoes upon entering the palace, Agamemnon is removed from the position of a conqueror to a weaker position. Moreover, the fact that Agamemnon is entering the palace barefoot also foreshadows his own imminent death (Levine 2015:257). Agamemnon no longer has the dominant, destroying foot, but rather walks barefoot to his bath where, completely naked and thus vulnerable, he will be overcome by the net and sword (Levine 2015:257-258). Wallace (2023:22) summarised the *Oresteia* quite well in three sentences, which also ties in with the walking on the red carpet:

As for *Oresteia*, Agamemnon brutally sacrifices his daughter Iphigeneia, abandoned his wife for 10 years, returns home with a barbarian concubine, speaks first not to his wife but to the gods and chorus [...]. Agamemnon walks on a red carpet like a woman,

a barbarian and a god [...]. *Agamemnon*'s citizen chorus condemns him for deciding to kill his daughter [...] (Wallace 2023:22).

By looking at this quote from Wallace, it would appear that Agamemnon gave Clytemnestra more than one reason to murder him. Not only did he sacrifice their daughter, but he also left to fight a war without showing any further remorse for his actions. After Agamemnon returns, he does not greet his wife first but rather speaks to the gods and the chorus first, and he even brings home a concubine. Even though Clytemnestra persuaded Agamemnon to walk on the red carpet, he walks with arrogance rather than humility.

Part of an interesting conversation between Coryphaeus and Cassandra takes place when Cassandra refuses to climb out of the carriage. Coryphaeus is the leader of the chorus, and the chorus is made up of the twelve elderly citizens of Argos.

CASSANDRA: Say godless slaughterhouse instead, say witness to unending horror, where kinsmen strike each other dead and blood is sprinkled on the floor.

CORYPHEUS: This foreign woman's sense of smell is like a hound's, and she'll detect some murders soon (Aesch. *Ag.* 1090-1094).

Coryphaeus then mentions in line 1098 that he has heard of Cassandra's prophetic abilities, which suggests that her speech can be seen as prophetic and that more than one murder will take place, since there is the reference to "slaughterhouse" in line 1090. Another reference to Cassandra's prophetic abilities is mentioned in line 1310 when she says, "This house. It reeks of bloody homicides" (Aesch. *Ag.* 1310). Once again death is mentioned in plural with "homicides", which would suggest that more than one murder will take place in the house. The victims of these murders are mentioned by Cassandra herself a few lines later when she says, "I'll enter anyway and there bewail my fate and Agamemnon's" (Aesch. *Ag.* 1313-1314).

The death of Agamemnon is announced by Agamemnon himself while he is being attacked in the bath. By attacking Agamemnon in the bath, Clytemnestra takes on a male avenging role when committing the murder in a female bath setting (Bierl 2017:529).

AGAMEMNON: (*inside the palace*) *Omoi!*<sup>53</sup> I'm struck a mortal blow within!

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<sup>53</sup> οἴμοι – an exclamation of pain or surprise, which is translated as "Ah me! Woe's me!." Definition according to LSJ.

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=%CE%BF%E1%BC%B4%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%B9&la=greeks#lexicon>

CORYPHAEUS: Quiet! Who's that shouting that he's struck a mortal blow?

AGAMEMNON: *Omoi!* I'm struck again, a second time! (Aesch. Ag.1343-1345).

The killer is presented after line 1370 with the palace doors opening, and it reveals Clytemnestra who is holding a sword over the dead bodies of both Agamemnon and Cassandra. In the *Oresteia*, there are three instances where an avenger stands over the dead bodies of their enemies and then defends the murders to the shocked chorus (Foley 2001:202). The death of Cassandra by Clytemnestra can be seen as the cure for her wrath; however, the problem with this cure is that it does not cure anyone else (Allen 2000:85). The victims of Clytemnestra lie side by side, and she is standing over their bodies. Agamemnon is still draped in the net while being trapped in the bath (Foley 2001:202). The death of both Agamemnon and Cassandra is seen as the climax of the tragedy where Clytemnestra proves an infraction by killing both and rising to power (Wallace 2023:23). The language used by Clytemnestra at this point of the tragedy is regarded to be more sinister, as she also voices the joy she feels after murdering Agamemnon (Porter 2023:121). She then gives a speech in which she reveals how she killed Agamemnon, who was in the bath at the time of his death. Interesting enough, her first weapon of choice is not the sword, but rather a net (Foley 2001:210).

I threw an endless fishing net around his head and arms, an evil wealth of clothes, and struck him twice. Each time he shouted *O!* then loosed his limbs. I struck another blow, a third, when he had fallen – pious thanks to chthonic Zeus – who guards the dead below. He lay there wheezing life away. At last, he vomited a shining clot of blood, which dappled me with dark red drops of dew (Aesch. Ag.1382-1390).

By looking at this extract above, the mentioning of “chthonic Zeus” in line 1388 is a reference to Hades, for he “guards the dead below.” Seaford (2023:284) refers to the death scene of Agamemnon as a form of a ritual for Hades. He refers to the words of Clytemnestra where she explains in detail how she killed Agamemnon: the three blows refer to the pouring of three libations where the third libation is to Hades (Seaford 2023:284). Furthermore, Seaford (2023:284) states that the murder of Agamemnon is also described as a sacrifice. The ritualistic aspect of the murder is based on the funeral ritual that prepares the dead for burial. First is the loving handling of the body, which becomes the handling that is preparing to kill. Secondly, the dead is wrapped in a robe, which also includes the hands and feet, and presents an ordained confinement that may have conveyed finality. Thirdly, during the preparation for burial, blood was washed away; however, in the case of Agamemnon, blood was caused to flow in the

bathing of Agamemnon (Seaford 2023: 285). It was understood that the origin of binding metaphors could originate from the use of civic punishment in Ancient Greece. Part of the civic punishment was to bind the offender physically before execution. Thus, by binding Agamemnon and making sure that he cannot fight back or escape, his fate is sealed, and his death becomes an execution. Furthermore, death by the sword was used during the wars. Even though Agamemnon's death occurred after the war ended, his death can be seen as payment for a war crime. The war crime would refer to the sacrifice of his daughter for the war in order to appease Artemis and receive favourable winds to carry them to Troy.

The chorus and Coryphaeus are both shocked by the boldness of Clytemnestra, and the chorus mentions that she will become an outcast. Clytemnestra then reveals the reason for as to why she has killed Agamemnon in the following lines,

And yet you didn't criticize this man who sacrificed his daughter like a lamb his teeming [woolly] flocks would never miss, the dearest child my [labour] pains brought forth – slain as a charm to calm the Thracian winds (Aesch. Ag.1414-1418).

Here Clytemnestra mentions Iphigeneia who was sacrificed by Agamemnon in order to gain favourable winds to sail to Troy. She appears to still not have forgiven him for this act of betrayal. Hall mentions that this was the important reason given as to why Agamemnon had to die, for he had to be held responsible for the death of Iphigeneia (2010:212). Clytemnestra, murdering Agamemnon while knowing that there are not any male relatives left in Argos that would be responsible for his funeral, is depriving him of his funeral rites (Hall 2010:79). She not only holds a justifiable position for murdering Agamemnon, but also revels in the slaughter of both Agamemnon and Cassandra (Bednarowski 2015:197). Shilo (2023:298) asserts here that Clytemnestra claims that she is both responsible and not responsible for the death of Agamemnon. The chorus' reaction to Aegisthus helping Clytemnestra commit the murders is that he should be pelted with stones to death, in other words be stoned as well as cursed by the people. This punishment was due to the fact that Aegisthus let a woman act for him, thus he is unworthy to be the ruler of Argos (Foley 2001:202). Foley states further that the punishment for involuntary homicide is banishment, which the chorus suggests for Clytemnestra (2001:212). The normal death penalty for deliberate, premeditated murder in Athens is stoning, which the chorus suggests for Aegisthus (Foley 2001:213).

The motives for the death of Agamemnon are clear and are found in the beginning as well as near the end of the tragedy. Clytemnestra holds Agamemnon responsible for the death of their



daughter, Iphigeneia, whom he sacrificed before sailing off to war. She kept nurturing that anger for the duration of the war, which lasted ten years, and kept on planning her revenge for the day when Agamemnon would return to Argos. However, the fact that Clytemnestra kept this rage going for ten years as well as planning the ultimate revenge can be seen as pettiness. The pettiness is seen as the ulterior motive for the murder. The death of Cassandra can also be seen as petty, since Agamemnon brought his mistress home with him after the war. Ironically, Clytemnestra did not stay faithful to Agamemnon and had an affair with Aegisthus, his cousin. Thus, Agamemnon's murder can be viewed as a petty murder, for it was uncalled for and unnecessary.

## **2.2. Euripides' *Medea*<sup>54</sup>**

It is believed that Euripides was born *circa* 480s BCE (Gould 2012:551). Euripides wrote at least 80 plays, and there is the possibility that he may even have written 92 plays (Hall 2010:231). However, only 78 plays have been preserved at Alexandria, and from these 78 plays, three plays are of unknown authenticity (Scodel 2017:28). Henrichs maintains that 70% of Euripides's surviving tragedies end with violent deaths (2000:177). There is not a lot of information available regarding dates for Euripides; however, some of his work can be dated with certainty. For instance, two dates that can be certain of is 455 BCE, when Euripides first competed in a competition, and 441 BCE, when he won his first competition (Hall 2010:232). Euripides created one of his most unforgettable characters, who is found in *Medea*, written in 431 BCE (Gilbert 2017:46). *Medea* is considered to be the only strong character in the play that can offer significant resistance to her plan (Gilbert 2017:48).

*Medea*, which was composed in 431 BCE, is a tragedy based on Medea, the wife of Jason, and Jason himself (Hall 2010:242). *Medea* has frequently been described as a revenge tragedy, and in spite of Medea's extreme and terrifying actions, she is motivated by traditional Greek attitudes to exact revenge (Swift 2017:87). Medea is also the granddaughter of Helios, the Sun god. Medea, Jason, and their two sons live in Corinth while being in exile. Since they are in exile, they have lost their high status as well as their royal status. However, Jason has found another way to regain his royal status: to marry the princess of Corinth, who is named Glauce. Her father, Creon, was the king of Corinth. Medea felt wronged and bitter towards Jason. She felt that he did not respect his love vows and all the help that she gave him on their journey, and she decided to take revenge on him. Due to Jason's words being shallow and self-serving,

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<sup>54</sup> Translation used for Euripides' *Medea* is by R. Kitzinger.

as well as him betraying the oaths he made to Medea, he caused her to become violent thus showing that she does not have a fundamentally barbarian aspect of her character. Ironically, the Greek Jason failed to respect the sacredness of oaths as well as the legal status that these oaths held, while the barbarian Medea kept criticising Jason for breaking his oaths and also expressed the familiar Greek form of morality (Swift 2017:81). Jason also disrespected her further by pointing out that she is not Greek and a foreigner and used the difference to point out the superiority of Greeks over the barbarians (Swift 2017:81). However, Creon is aware of what she is planning and orders her to leave with her children. To add fuel to the fire, Jason does not take her side and accuses her of being selfish and just causing trouble (Spathari 2014:160). Foley (2001:243) presents the suggestion that in *Medea*, there are no clear effective opponents, but rather that the main opponent is Medea herself. When Medea first contemplated her ideas of vengeance, she aimed to avoid the laughter of her enemies and avoid being mocked by them when she first announced the plan to kill her children as well (Swift 2017:82). Troupi (2013:101) asserts that Medea can be identified as an angry, spurned woman who was motivated by her husband's betrayal of their vows.

The result of Medea being exiled by not only Jason, but also by Creon makes her angry. She becomes so angry that Creon feared her, almost as if he knows that something might happen if she stays there. The following words by Creon affirm this fear and knowledge that he is aware Medea might do something out of anger.

I fear you. No need to disguise my reasons. I fear you might do my child fatal harm. And there are many indications I am right: you were born clever, you have dangerous skills, and the loss of your marriage bed gives you pain (Eur. *Med.* 282-286).

Medea, very cleverly, tries to persuade Creon that she is not as evil as he thinks or that she harbours any ill will against him, his daughter and Jason. However, Creon is not convinced by her words:

To my ears what you say is mild, but I fear in your heart you are plotting something bad. I trust you far less now than before. A woman of fiery temper is easier to guard against than one who's clever and quiet (Eur. *Med.* 316-320).

If the audience is aware of what is coming later in the tragedy, then perhaps one can interpret the words of Creon as someone who knows that something is going to happen at a later stage, who is trying his best to protect his daughter from the wrath of Medea. Boedeker (1997:134) asserts that Creon realises that Medea is not merely a woman, but rather a vengeful, resourceful,

and pitiable woman. The fact that Medea is considered to be vengeful should present the idea that she is acting on emotions that can be considered irrational. Medea is angry for being exiled and replaced by Creon's daughter and decides to act upon this anger.

After a few lines, there is a speech between Jason and Medea where he announces his marriage to Glauce and mentions that he will take care of the children and arranges for Medea to be taken care of with some of his friends. However, Medea does not appreciate the help and starts to plot something.

*(shouting after him)* Go! Why waste time here when you're seized with craving for the girl you've won. *(more quietly)* Enjoy your bride, for it may be your marriage will make you weep – the god will prove my words (Eur. *Med.*624-627).

Medea is confronted by Jason's words which are humiliating, and she also resents his denial. Medea has two choices: either she can ignore his betrayal and risk being laughed at by her enemies and suffer a more comprehensive humiliation as well as moral degradation or she can set in motion a deadly struggle for recognition as well as revenge (Sezer 2015:220). Medea, without giving it any further thought, chose the second option, taking revenge. Revenge based on anger does not always work out well and can be considered to be irrational behaviour. The method that Medea will use to kill the princess is mentioned in the following lines. She even used her children to deliver the deadly gift.

My reason for this is not to leave my children in this hostile place, to be abused by foes, but so that I can use guile to kill the king's child. I'll send my sons with gifts in their arms, a delicate robe and headband of beaten gold. If she takes the ornaments, puts them on her skin, she'll die – and all who touch her – a terrible death. I'll anoint my gifts with a poison that can do this. That's enough for this part of the story. Now hear what follows: I weep for what I must do; for then I'll kill my children. No one will give relief (Eur. *Med.*781-793).

[...] The children I bore him he'll never see alive again; he'll never have a child with his new bride: the wretched woman must die from my poison, a wretched death (Eur. *Med.*803-806).

Not only does Medea say how she will kill Glauce, with the use of a robe and a headband soaked in poison, but she will also kill her children afterwards. In the next few lines after the method, lines 803-806, she gives the reason why both Glauce and the children have to die. Their deaths are to spite Jason, so that he will live in misery for the rest of his life because he

wants to replace Medea and then send her away without her children. Using poison as punishment is more frequently associated with women than with men in ancient texts. One example of this is Medea punishing Jason by poisoning his new wife (Allen 2000:118). Euripides' Medea is the first known child-killing mother found in the Greek myth (Hall 2010:243). Poison, namely hemlock, was used in civic punishments and executions. Furthermore, poisonings were quite common in the ancient world. Medea was known as the master poisoner and the predecessor for poisoners who came after her. One can say that Medea was a role model for poisoners who came after her.

Medea's plan nearly fails, for Jason does not want to accept the gifts and almost sends them back. Nevertheless, Medea manages to persuade him to keep the gifts and pass them on to Glauce. Gifts in Greek tragedy are practically without exception dangerous (Hall 2010:80). In other words, receiving a gift in a Greek tragedy is considered not to be a joyous matter, but rather a premonition that something dangerous will happen to the receiver. The chorus foretold the fate of the princess and also of the children's horrific fate that awaits them.

Now I can hope no longer for the children's lives, hope no longer. Now they go to their death. The bride will take the golden band, will take her doom, her misery. She'll put on the diadem with her two hands, put Death around her golden hair (Eur. *Med.*976-981).

The nurse fears for the children, especially since she sees the extent of Medea's rage. She is afraid that the children will be seen by Medea in her state of anger and that the sight of the children might trigger a form of rage (Allen 2000:79). This is the unfortunate part, for the Chorus already fear the fate of the children and this presents the premonition that something will happen to them. The death of Glauce and of her mother is reported by a messenger that comes running towards Medea. He warns her that she must leave the city immediately and must get away as quickly as she can. Medea asks what has happened that requires her to leave immediately, to which the messenger replies,

The young girl, royal bride, and Creon her father are dead – killed just now, and by your poisons! (Eur. *Med.*1125-1126).

The messenger further explains in detail what has happened to both the princess and to Creon. The princess is disgusted when she sees the two children but accepts the gifts very eagerly. Jason asks her to beg her father to release the children from exile, and she agrees to everything. Once Jason and his two children leave, she puts on the robe and headband.

When she saw their gifts, she didn't resist; she agreed to everything, and, before your children and their father were far away, she took the gorgeous robes and put them on. She placed the golden band around her curls and looked in a bright mirror to arrange her hair, laughing at the lifeless image she saw there. Then she stood up from her chair and walked around the room, her white feet stepping softly. She loved the gifts; she kept looking behind as she stretched her ankle out below the robe. What happened then was terrible to see. Her skin changed colour. She lurched backward, trembling in every limb; she barely reached a chair to sit on, so she wouldn't fall. A slave, an old woman, gave a ritual cry, thinking her frenzy had come from Pan or another god. Then she saw the white foam bubbling from her mouth, her pupils turned back in the sockets of her eyes, her bloodless skin. The cry turned into a great wailing shriek, and the old woman rushed straight away to the king's house (Eur. *Med.* 1156-1178).

However, this is not all that happens to the princess. For after the woman leaves and another to goes and tell Jason what is happening, the final part of the misfortune is about to strike.

It took the time a sprinter takes to fly to the finish of a one-stade course for the wretched girl to rouse herself and cry out in horror, her eyes and mouth no longer shut. The pain was attacking her on a double front: the band of gold she'd placed around her head shot out an astounding stream of devouring fire; the delicate robe, your children's gift, was gnawing the white flesh of the doomed girl. On fire she rises from the chair and runs about, shaking her head and hair in all directions. She was trying to throw off the golden band, but it stayed tightly bound as the fire flared out, now twice as fierce as when she shook her hair. Overcome by suffering she falls to the floor. No one could recognize her, only her father could: her eyes and fine-boned face no longer had a clear shape; blood and fire mingled together, fell dripping from her head. Her skin like the sap of a fir tree oozed off her bones, loosed by the jaws of the unseen poison. An awful sight. Everyone feared to touch the corpse, taking our instruction from what happened. Her wretched father knew nothing of the disaster. In ignorance he entered the room and ran to the body. At once he cried out and folded in his arms; kissing her [...] When he'd finish wailing and groaning we wanted to lift up his aged body, but he was struck to the delicate robe like ivy to a laurel branch. His struggle was desperate. He tried and tried to get up his knees, but the corpse kept pulling him back, if he moved with force, he ripped his ageing flesh from the bone. In time, he gave it up and breathed his last, rising no longer above calamity. The bodies of the child

and aged father lie side by side, a misfortune calling for tears (Eur. *Med.*1181-1207;1211-1221).

Medea does not seem to be bothered by this information regarding the deaths of Creon and his daughter nor the manner in which they died. The death of Creon's daughter and Creon himself is quick, thus, it would appear that the poison used is a severe poison as well as a fast-acting poison. Her only response is the following:

Friends, my course is set: quick as I can I kill the children and leave this land. I mustn't delay or give over to some other harsher hand the killing of the children. They must die, they must. And, since they must, I, who gave them birth, will kill them (Eur. *Med.*1233-1238).

Hall (2010:7) states that Medea changes her mind quite frequently regarding killing her children before she goes through with her initial plan by killing them. Ohlander (1989:36) states that the entire plot of *Medea* revolves around Medea, who only leaves the stage once, in order to prepare and execute the murder of her children. Medea manages to manipulate her enemies without any effort, and as the tragedy goes on, things only become easier and easier for her (Ohlander 1989:130). However, the final battlefield will not be between Medea and her enemies, but rather within herself. Near the end of the tragedy, Medea begins to falter, for now she must face her inner struggle, the struggle regarding the death of her children (Ohlander 1989:131). The only information there is in the tragedy that the children are being killed is that their voices are heard from within the house. Jason has arrived, and the chorus informs him of what Medea has done.

CHORUS: Your children are dead – by their mother's hand.

JASON: *oimoi*, what can you mean? You have destroyed me.

CHORUS: You must believe that your children live no longer.

JASON: Where did she kill them? Inside the house? Outside?

CHORUS: Open the doors. Look on your murdered children (Eur. *Med.*1309-1313).

The doors are locked, thus Jason cannot get into the house. Medea appears on the roof of the house in a chariot along with the bodies of the two sons. The chariot was sent by Helios. Helios is seen as an important "behind-the-scenes" character, since he helps Medea escape by sending his chariot (Hall 2010:93). Medea leaves as a barbarian and flees in the chariot (Hall 2010:242).

It is said that Euripides was the first poet that turned Medea from a Corinthian into a barbarian (Hall 2010:244). Nonetheless, it is Medea's fearlessness that must command respect from the ancient audience as well as the modern reader. She is described as a bold and scheming woman who is also very clever and does not allow anything to stand in her way or vanquish her (Ohlander 1989:70).

Hall (2010:151-152) remarks that Euripides was aware that the poor reputation of women in myth was due to the male poets that created these myths. Furthermore, "Euripides' *Medea* includes a supremely negative portrait of a vituperative, vindictive, and murderous female which could only be the product of a patriarchal society". Hall (2010:164) states further that Euripides' version of Medea and her portrayal in his tragedy "was exploiting the real anxieties of Athenian men, who feared women with expertise in lotions, potions, and incantations". Allen (2000:80) remarks that Medea's revenge is killing innocent people that have done her no wrong. Ohlander (1989:137) mentions an interesting fact regarding Medea: Medea is unique and what makes her unique is the fact that her revenge must be complete. In other words, she must not only get even with Jason, but triumph over him completely (Ohlander 1989:137). While Medea does not face the consequences of her actions, she also does not appear to be traumatised by what she has done or show any regret for the decisions that she has made (Swift 2017:87). Boedeker (1997:127-128) noted that several commentators have remarked that Medea as a human being is dead, instead in her place there is a goddess of vengeance.

The possible motives that Medea has are anger and jealousy. She is angry at the fact that Jason is replacing her and marrying someone else. She is also angry that Creon wanted to exile her and that she is laughed at by the Corinthian women. She is jealous of Creon's daughter, since Jason wants to marry her rather than stay with Medea. However, since Medea acts on both anger and jealousy, she still shows very strong signs that the murders were based on pettiness, especially the executions of her two children. Thus, the ulterior motive for killing the children is pettiness. Medea kills her children because she does not want Jason to have them, and she kills Creon's daughter for the same reason. This can be seen as pure pettiness, for it is based on the idea that if she cannot have something, then no one else can.

### **3. Murder in Latin Tragedies**

Latin tragedies are the result of the Greek tragedies, where Greek tragedies were used as the blueprints for the Latin tragedies. Many of the surviving Latin tragedies are Latin translations of the original Greek tragedies; however, there are a few differences between the originals and



the translations. Some of the differences are minor and do not have a big impact on the storyline. However, there are some differences that are quite major and do have a considerable impact on the storyline.

It is believed that Seneca was born between 4 BCE and 1 CE and lived during the first century CE (Reynolds, Griffin & Fantham 2012:92). Seneca's most important works are reckoned to be his tragedies, which includes *Medea* and *Agamemnon* (Reynolds, Griffin & Fantham 2012: 93-94). Boyle (1983:3) states that Seneca is considered to be an enigma. This can be seen due to the arguments among scholars who argue against the judgement of tragedies with regard to the Greek predecessors. However, it has been realized that Seneca did not adapt single Greek tragedies, but rather that he drew inspiration from the entire corpus of tragedies (Reynolds, Griffin & Fantham 2012:94). The plays have been called rhetorical and have also been claimed to be Stoic. Seneca's tragedies are considered to be Stoic due to the presiding theme in the victory of evil that was released by unrestrained passion as well as the spread of destruction from man to the sphere of nature surrounding him (Reynolds, Griffin & Fantham 2012:94). Marshall (2014:37) states that it is believed that *Agamemnon* was written around 54 CE, along with two other tragedies. *Medea*, along with two other tragedies, appeared at the same time, around 54 CE; however, these three tragedies could have appeared at an earlier date (Marshall 2014:39). In both *Medea* and *Agamemnon*, vengeance is the dedication that creates dramatic action (Chaumartin 2014:661).

### **3.1. Seneca's *Agamemnon*<sup>55</sup>**

Seneca's *Agamemnon* is described as a revenge-drama. Agamemnon leaves for war in order to take revenge on Troy and then returns to Argos only to be caught up in Clytemnestra's thirst for revenge (Shelton 1983:159). *Agamemnon*, as written by Aeschylus, can be seen as a "distant ancestor" of the version written by Seneca (Fitch 2018:125). Act One and Act Two from Seneca's version have no precedent in the drama written by Aeschylus. The only section that is, in general, reminiscent of Aeschylus is the section where Cassandra describes the murder of Agamemnon in the palace due to her prophetic abilities (Fitch 2018:125). Each action of revenge that takes place in the tragedy includes treachery or impiety (Shelton 1983:159). A section of Clytemnestra's anger can be found in the following two lines, an anger that has been building up during the time of the Trojan War along with resentment.

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<sup>55</sup> Translation used for Seneca's *Agamemnon* is by J.G. Fitch.

CLYTEMNESTRA: *My memory if also of my daughter's marriage torches and my son-in-law Achilles: he kept true faith with the mother!* (Sen. Ag. 158-159).

According to Fitch (2018:141), the “he” mentioned here is a reference to Agamemnon and the phrase “kept true faith” is considered to be said sarcastically. The daughter is Iphigeneia, who was sacrificed by Agamemnon to Artemis. The desire for revenge by Clytemnestra is fuelled by four emotions that were mentioned earlier in lines 133-135. These four emotions are anger, jealousy, lust and fear. Anger is due to Agamemnon, who sacrificed Iphigeneia by luring her and Clytemnestra under false pretences and jealousy can also be connected to anger, for Agamemnon was unfaithful with Cassandra, making Clytemnestra jealous of Cassandra. Lust was for Aegisthus and then the final emotion, namely fear, was the fear that Agamemnon would punish her for her infidelity and that Cassandra might replace her as the queen of Argos (Shelton 1983:164).

A short conversation between Cassandra and Agamemnon, who just returned to Argos, reveals that the death of Agamemnon is near.

AGAMEMNON: Let us do reverence at the altar.

CASSANDRA: Father fell before the altar.

AGAMEMNON: Let us pray to Jove together.

CASSANDRA: Hercean Jove?

AGAMEMNON: You think you see Ilium?

CASSANDRA: Yes, and Priam as well (Sen. Ag. 792-794).

Priam was the father of Cassandra and the king of Ilium, which is another name for Troy. The last line of the conversation between Cassandra and Agamemnon ends with Cassandra saying, “Yes, and Priam as well.” This statement is made by Cassandra because Priam died before an altar; therefore, it is a reference that a king is fated to be killed in his own palace and that Agamemnon is the king who will be killed in his own palace (Fitch 2018:195). Cassandra also hints at the fact that Agamemnon is responsible for the destruction of Troy and that he will suffer the same fate as Priam. However, Agamemnon does not realise this (Shelton 1983:175). Kugelmeier (2014:496) adds to this short conversation between Cassandra and Agamemnon, showing that there is an important significance in the conversation. The short conversation shows the central motifs in the thinking of Seneca in terms of death as freedom and the fate of

Troy as a form of a warning (Kugelmeier 2014:496-497). Cassandra gives a more direct hint that death awaits Agamemnon.

CASSANDRA: For me death is security.

AGAMEMNON: There is no danger for you.

CASSANDRA: But great danger for you (Sen. Ag. 797-798).

The death of Agamemnon was not announced in the traditional way of the original Greek tragedies, in other words via a messenger or the chorus, but was rather described by Cassandra.

CASSANDRA: A great deed is being done inside, a match for those ten years (Sen. Ag. 867).

CASSANDRA: A feast is being held, laid out in the royal house – like that of last banquet for the Phrygians. The couch is resplendent with purple cloths from Ilium, and they quaff their wine from the gold of old Assaracus. He himself lies in state in an embroidered robe, his body clothed in proud spoils from Priam. His wife bids him take off this enemy attire and put on instead a mantle woven by her hand, his faithful spouse. I shudder and tremble in spirit! Shall the king be murdered by an exile, the husband of an adulterer? The hour of fate has come. The feast's last course will see the master's blood – yes, blood will drop into the wine. The deadly garment he has put on binds him and delivers him to death by treachery. Its loose, impenetrable folds imprison his head and give his hands no way out. The half-man gouges his side with a trembling hand – but he has not thrust deep, he freezes in the very act of wounding! [...] The Tyndarid madly arms herself with a double-bladed ax, and tries aiming at various points with those wicked hands, just as an attendant at the altar marks out the bulls' necks by eye before striking with the steel. He's hit, it's all over! The head hangs by a small segment, not cleanly cut off. Here blood pours from the torso, there lies the face with its mouth still shouting. They are not yet stepping away: *he* attacks Agamemnon now he is dead and mutilates his body, *she* assists in the stabbing (Sen. Ag. 875-905).

The first part of Cassandra's prophetic vision and speech is where she declares that something bad is happening inside the palace and that this is due to ten years of misery and pain. The ten years is a reference to the duration of the Trojan War, during which Clytemnestra had to wait for the war to end in order to exact her revenge on Agamemnon for sacrificing their daughter. With regards to the scene leading up to the death of Agamemnon, Cassandra plays the role of

the messenger found in the Greek tragedies by explaining in full detail what is taking place. She starts by laying out the scene in the palace by saying that there is a feast being held and that Agamemnon is dressed very lavishly while lying on the couch. However, Clytemnestra persuades Agamemnon to get rid of the fancy and expensive clothes and to wear a mantle that she has woven for him. Little does he know that this mantle will act as a snare in order to make him immobile. Clytemnestra is not mentioned in this extract by name, but rather described as the “The Tyndarid”, which is a reference to her father, Tyndareus. The phrase, “He’s hit, it’s all over” is meant literally and that “he has it”, which means the wound. This is a phrase taken from gladiatorial fights (Fitch 2018:203). The more Agamemnon struggles to free himself from the folds of the mantel, the more he tangles himself in the folds. The section that was left out was an analogy of a boar captured in a net, where the more he struggles, the more tangled he becomes in the net. Clytemnestra picks up a double-bladed axe and decapitates Agamemnon. Aegisthus stabs Agamemnon and mutilates his body, and Clytemnestra likewise continues stabbing Agamemnon. At the end of the tragedy, Cassandra embraces death and is happy to die because she knows that death will free her from the ugliness of the world (Shelton 1983:177). Freedom and victory unite in Cassandra through death, for in gaining freedom lies her victory and in death and accepting death lies her freedom (Boyle 1983:207). As mentioned earlier with the binding of the Greek Agamemnon, binding was part of civic punishment before someone was executed. Thus, Agamemnon’s murder can be seen as an execution, since he is tied up with a mantel that restricts his movements the more, he struggles to free himself from it. Ironically enough, decapitation was seen as one of the most respectable forms of execution, especially in the Roman empire, but Agamemnon’s death cannot be seen as respectable since he is captured in a mantle, like a wild animal captured in a net. Continuing to mutilate his body after he is dead can be seen as a form of *damnatio memoriae*, for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus see Agamemnon as an enemy of the state who should be condemned. Furthermore, they also want to erase his memory and thus continue to stab and mutilate his body after death.

Clytemnestra’s possible motives are anger and jealousy. She nurtured her anger for ten years while Agamemnon was away in Troy and planned her revenge. She is also jealous of the fact that he brought his mistress, namely Cassandra, who was also a prisoner of war, with him. Clytemnestra is afraid that Cassandra will replace her as the queen. However, binding Agamemnon in a mantle while he is in the bath can be seen as a cowardly move, for she is killing someone who is vulnerable and helpless who cannot defend themselves. The ulterior motive for killing Agamemnon is also pettiness, for she had an affair with Agamemnon’s

cousin, but became angry when Agamemnon brought his mistress home from the war. It can be seen as an ironic twist.

### 3.2. Seneca's *Medea*<sup>56</sup>

Harrison (2014:594) asserts that *Medea* is frequently considered to be a masterpiece of Seneca's earlier tragedies. The story of Medea was also well-loved by the Roman audiences, and Seneca's concern was to orientate his *Medea* for his audience (Harrison 2014:597). Seneca's *Medea* begins with Medea's unhappiness and anger. The tragedy presents the protagonist in a world that appears to be without justice. The protagonist, Medea, is also a victim of the broken faith of Jason and Creon as well as a victim of her past actions of her and Jason's journey (Fyfe 1983:77). The date of the tragedy is uncertain, but it is believed to be produced from pre-Neronian times (Liebermann 2014:459). It is assumed that the marriage between Jason and the daughter of Creon has already been announced and Medea has been told to leave Corinth. The beginning of the tragedy is a speech by Medea, proclaiming her anguish at the fact that Jason is leaving her for the daughter of Creon. Interesting enough, and only mentioned much later in the tragedy, Seneca names the daughter of Creon Creusa and not Glauce, as with Euripides. This can be seen in line 817. A few lines later, a speech takes place between Medea and the nurse. Seneca's *Medea* is seen to be close in action as well as characterisation to Euripides' *Medea* (Reynolds, Griffin & Fantham 2012:94). Latin tragedies were written with a different purpose in mind than with the Greek tragedies. The Latin tragedies' purpose was not to examine the human justice or man's conflict with fate, but rather to portray the amplification of human passions (Ohlander 1989:202). Seneca builds tension in a complete opposite way to Euripides. Instead of keeping Medea on the stage throughout the play and keeping appearances of the children brief, Seneca keeps the children off-stage completely and has Medea come onto stage and leave at a constant pace (Ohlander 1989:239). Medea, from the beginning of the tragedy, appears to be justified; however, she nevertheless does these appalling things (Nussbaum 1997:223). Seneca depicts Medea as an honest, shrewd, regal, and strong person, and Medea sees her murderous acts as appropriate (Nussbaum 1997:225). Jason does not understand Medea, nor does he reach up to her level, and as a result, he underestimates her (Liebermann 2014:466). The main question regarding *Medea* is not the question of who is right or wrong, but rather who will win in the end (Harrison 2014:595). Harrison (2014:619) states Medea's state of mind in a very clear way, "Once Medea hones her

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<sup>56</sup> Translation used for Seneca's *Medea* is by E. Wilson.

focus, nothing and no one else exists apart from her desire to teach Jason a horrible lesson. With each murder, she has a chance to be sated with carnage, but each only whets her appetite”. In other words, once Medea has set her focus on the task at hand, namely, to teach Jason a lesson and to get rid of Creon and his daughter, nothing will stop Medea from completing her task. Furthermore, the more murders she commits, the less she is satisfied with the bloodbaths she has caused. The destruction of Corinth and each murder only kindle her bloodlust even more. Medea is driven by anger, hate and spitefulness. The reason to kill Creon’s daughter is that Jason is alone and will not have anyone other than Medea. She aims to show him that after all that she has done for him, she is the only one for him.

The nurse tries to calm Medea down, but Medea does not listen to her. Creon is suspicious of Medea and fears that she is busy planning something and exiles her from Corinth. Jason comes to see Medea and tells her that he was the one to persuade Creon to exile her rather than kill her. Seneca’s *Medea* allows her passion for revenge to subdue her reason (Foley 2001:246). Medea will stop at nothing in order to fulfil her desire for revenge (Ohlander 1989:209). This is also due to Medea gaining a “freedom of indifference” by removing any ties to the world, which includes not only the murder of her children that were the receiver of her love but by ruining her love for Jason which makes the children and anything else valuable (Fyfe 1983:77). Medea is becoming more and more violent in both her language and her behaviour, and also becomes more irrational with her rising fury. The nurse fears the wrath of Medea. Medea is also aware of the fact that she is hated by the people of Corinth, as well as feared and unwanted (Fyfe 1983:79). Fyfe (1983:82) adds further that both the speech of the nurse as well as the speech made by Medea build up an ambience of horror.

NURSE: My soul is terrified; it shudders. Evil is near. How great her bitterness is growing!  
Now it fires itself, and it restores the force that it had lost (Sen. *Med.*670-672).

Further along, the nurse quotes Medea and her plan of revenge. This description given by the nurse can be seen as proof of the magical power that is contained in the language that Medea use, for Medea’s song is able to produce serpents and noxious herbs from all over the world (Fyfe 1983:82).

Some of the plants were cut by iron, while Apollo got ready the day, the stem of others is cut at the dead of night, others cropped with a fingernail, while a charm is said. She gathers the poisonous plants and squeezes the venom of the snakes, and mixes it with birds of ill omen, the heart of a melancholy eagle-owl, and the innards cut from a living screech-owl.

These, the great criminal mastermind laid out separately. Some contain the devouring power of fire; others hold the icy cold of bitter frost. She added to the poisons certain words – themselves equally dangerous. Listen! You can hear her crazy feet. She is chanting and the world is shaking at her spell (Sen. *Med.* 728-739).

This extract describes Medea's plan to exact her revenge. She is extracting various kinds of poisons, mixing them with other substances as well as dangerous words, in other words a form of a spell. According to Ohlander (1989:265), by mentioning where the herbs and other materials are coming from, Seneca is showing the audience Medea's extensive knowledge of the black arts. Medea's incantation in lines 740-848 is viewed as a form of a dark parody of the ἐπιθαλάμιος<sup>57</sup> (Fyfe 1983:83). A few lines later on show the 'spell' that Medea was chanting and the method of how she will use the poisons.

Now anoint Creusa's clothes, and as soon as she puts them on, let a snaky flame burn up very marrow of her bones. Let the fire hid in yellow gold, in darkness (Sen. *Med.* 817-821).

Hecate, whip up my poisons, and keep secret the seeds of flame in my gifts: may they deceive the eyes, submit to touch, but may the heat swim to the heart and veins, make melt the limbs and smoke the bones and may that newly wedded bride outdo her marriage torch with her own smoking hair (Sen. *Med.* 832-839).

The images of fire, burning and flame that are mentioned in her incantations foreshadow the fire that surpasses the law of nature in later lines, and these images of fire also symbolises Medea's thirst for revenge (Fyfe 1983:83). Medea then sends her two children to deliver the wedding gift to the bride. Hecate, who is mentioned in the extract above, was a great goddess, and was prior to the twelve gods of Olympus. It was believed that Hecate was the patroness of night travellers, witches, and unguarded places. Since it was also maintained that she was closely related to witchcraft and witch activities, particularly during the night, it was determined that she had control over criminals and ghosts that harm people (Spathari 2014:9). The poison that Medea concocts appears to be a severe and fast-acting poison that will cause Creon's daughter to die very quickly. However, the fire that is fuelled by water is a magical touch to the story, as well as the destruction of Corinth. The fire that came with the poisoning and destroying Corinth is a magical touch that is also found in Euripides's *Medea*.

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<sup>57</sup> ἐπιθαλάμιος translated refers to the bridal song that was sung at weddings. Definition according to LSJ. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=%E1%BC%90%CF%80%CE%B9%CE%B8%CE%B1%CE%B%CE%AC%CE%BC%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%82&la=greek#lexicon>



The death of the princess and also the death of her father is delivered by means of a messenger, who only mentions that the city is being devoured by flames, which cannot be extinguished. This messenger delivering the announcement is very different from the messenger in Euripides' *Medea*. For in the original Greek version, the messenger comes to announce not only the death of Creon and his daughter but also to explain in full detail what exactly happened to them. However, the only indication as to what might have happened to both of them is found in the speech made by Medea earlier. According to Henry and Walker (1967:170), the report by the messenger regarding the deaths of Creon and his daughter is quite brief, almost as if it was reported in a hurried and uninterested way.

MESSENGER: Now all is lost, the whole state of the kingdom is fallen: daughter and father lie mixed with ash (Sen. *Med.*879-880).

MESSENGER: Devouring flame is raging through the palace, obeying some command. Now the whole house has fallen, people fear for the city.

CHORUS: Get water, put out the flames!

MESSENGER: In this disaster, something magical: water feeds the flames, the more they fight the fire, the higher still it burns. It robs out defences (Sen. *Med.*886-890).

This fire destroying Corinth in all probability will never be extinguished. For this fire surpasses the law of nature: as long as people keep on throwing water on the fire, this fire feeds on the water (Fyfe 1983:90). At the end of the tragedy, Creon and his daughter are dead, Jason is brought to impotent rage, and Medea is aware that Jason is powerless to hurt her (Henry & Walker 1967:171). In the past, the crimes that Medea had committed were done out of love and loyalty for Jason, which appeared justified in her mind. However, the new crimes that Medea commits are entirely for her own pleasure and vengeance. Medea finally becomes the barbaric woman that the Corinthians believe her to be (Benton 2003:279). Once Jason arrives, he sees that Medea is on the roof of the house and orders that someone bring fire to burn her to death. However, the speech made by Medea after this will have a different outcome than he would have imagined. The murder of Creusa was not enough, though, to fully acquire her revenge; Medea aims to repeat all her past crimes with exact precision (Guastella 2001:203).

MEDEA: Heap up a funeral pyre for your own sons, Jason, and strew the burial mound. Your wife and father-in-law now have their proper rites: I have buried them. This one has already met his fate; this one will die the same, but you will watch (Sen. *Med.*998-1001).

MEDEA: I will drive my sword into that very spot which hurts you most. Now, proud man, go off and marry virgins. Leave mothers alone.

JASON: One boy is enough for revenge.

MEDEA: If my hand had been able to find satisfaction in just one murder, I should have done none. Although I shall kill two, the number is too small to satisfy my pain. If my womb even now contains any pledge of our love, I, the mother, will scrape my insides with my sword, I will bring it out with the blade (Sen. *Med.*1006-1012).

Medea delays the second murder, and Seneca, by extending the second murder, extends also the torture and tension (Ohlander 1989:288). Medea kills both sons, with one being killed before the eyes of Jason. The scale of revenge is related to the moral horror of the crime (Liebermann 2014:469). By killing the first child, a chain reaction of uncontrollable pleasure begins. The uncontrollable pleasure comes when Medea realises that the combination of cruelty, uncontrollable pleasure and power will be enough to make Jason watch those he loves die in front of his eyes (Benton 2003:279). The tragedy ends with Medea leaving on a chariot that was sent by Helios, and Jason watches as she escapes. Ohlander (1989:289) makes an interesting connection between the beginning of the tragedy and the end: in the beginning of the tragedy, Medea addresses the gods directly. He states the following, “Bear witness wherever you ride that there are no gods. The tragedy began with gods to end with none” (Ohlander 1989:289). The ending cannot be explained in any other way than with these words from Ohlander. By committing murder and venturing into the black arts, Medea deserted the gods, and they now desert her. Even though Helios sends a chariot to aid in her escape, he is not there to help her, and wherever she is going, the gods will not be there to help her in any other way. In the end, Medea is completely alone, without her children and without the gods. In the play by Euripides, the children are killed offstage. However, in Seneca’s version, not only does Medea kill the first child in front of the audience as well as the second child in front of Jason, but she also threatens to search her womb with a sword and kill any child that she may be expecting (Star 2017:559). Seneca’s version relishes in public violence, a theme that was subdued in previous versions (Swift 2017:559). In the end, Medea inflicts punishments instead of suffering punishment (Staley 2010:32). Staley (2010:94) asserts further that Medea’s “tragedy” was not neither due to fate nor was it accidental, but rather that it was chosen by free will.

Possible motives for Medea are anger, hate and spitefulness. Spitefulness may not appear as a proper motive; however, it is considered a great motivator for someone to purposefully harm someone else. Thus, in this case it acts as a motivator for Medea to harm Jason in more than one way. Anger as a motive is due to Jason distancing himself from Medea after arriving in Corinth and Creon exiling Medea before the wedding of Creon's daughter and Jason. Hate as a motive is also due to Jason distancing himself from Medea as well as being exiled from Corinth. The combination of hate and anger is what drove Medea to poison the wedding gifts that she has delivered via her children to Creon's daughter. Not only does the poison kill the daughter, but it also kills Creon and destroys Corinth. Spitefulness causes Medea to murder the first boy and make Jason watch while she kills the second boy. However, the murder of the two children can also be due to pettiness, which is seen as an ulterior motive. The children's murders are petty, for they are innocent and have done nothing wrong, but were going to stay with Jason and not with Medea. Thus, Medea's line of argument was that if she cannot have them, then neither will Jason.

#### **4. Summary**

By looking at the four tragedies, there are clear similarities as well as clear differences between the original Greek versions and the translated Latin versions. Euripides and Aeschylus relied on traditional forms of writing tragedies. Since the tragedies were performed on a stage and had a limited number of actors, many of the big events happened off-stage. This can be seen with the murder of Agamemnon. The only indication given that he is being murdered are his cries that are heard by the audience. A further indication given that Agamemnon is murdered is when his body is revealed on stage with Clytemnestra standing over him while holding a sword. The motives for the murder of Agamemnon are made clear throughout the tragedy. Clytemnestra is angry at Agamemnon for sacrificing their daughter before leaving for the war at Troy. Although she kills Cassandra as well, it can be seen as ironic, since Clytemnestra did not stay faithful to Agamemnon. However, the ulterior motive for the murders is also clear: pettiness. Clytemnestra had ten years to consider all possibilities as to why Agamemnon had to sacrifice their daughter, but she rather used the time to plan her revenge and keep her anger going. Thus, the murder can be seen as petty, since it is unnecessary.

The difference between Aeschylus' version and Seneca's version is that in Aeschylus' version, Cassandra is killed with Agamemnon in the bathroom and Agamemnon is bound with a net and stabbed to death. In Seneca's version, Cassandra is killed at the end after Agamemnon has

already died, and she narrates his murder. Agamemnon is bound with a mantle while in the bath and decapitated with an axe and then stabbed multiple times and mutilated after death. He is killed by both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. With regards to the motives found in Seneca's version of *Agamemnon*, it appears to be the same as in Aeschylus' version. In Seneca's version, the motives of Clytemnestra are also anger and jealousy. She is angry at Agamemnon for luring and sacrificing their daughter and bringing back a mistress from the war. She was also jealous of Cassandra, for she fears that Cassandra will replace her as queen. However, there is also an ulterior motive, which is pettiness. For Clytemnestra acts and kills for petty motives.

With the murders in *Medea*, Euripides makes use of the messenger to relay the deaths and events that take place. After Medea sends the poisoned robe and headdress to Creon's daughter, she waits for the results. The results are announced by a messenger that comes to her and describes in full detail what had happened. After putting on the poisoned clothes, Creon's daughter feels the effects of the poison and loses consciousness for a moment until she jumps up and starts running around while being engulfed in flames. By running around, she sets the palace on fire until she falls to the floor and Creon comes to hold her where the poison seeps into him and he dies as well. Before Jason arrives, Medea kills the two children in the house, and when he arrives, the Chorus announces to him that his children are dead. Furthermore, when Medea appears on the top of house, she holds the corpses of the two children and flees on a chariot. The motives are made clear throughout the tragedy: anger and jealousy. She is angry at Jason for abandoning their vows and angry at Creon for exiling her. She is also jealous that Jason is going to leave her for someone else. However, the ulterior motive is also made clear, especially in Medea's speeches and her actions. The ulterior motive is that of pettiness, for poisoning someone through gifts that are sent as well as murdering the children shows that Medea wants to hurt Jason through her actions and wants him to suffer and left with nothing. These reasons make Medea's actions look petty.

The difference between Euripides' version and Seneca's version is in the detail of the poisoning and how it is announced as well as the murder of the two children. Euripides makes use of the messenger to announce the exact details of what takes place with the poisoning and the fire. Seneca used the messenger as well, but the messenger only announces that Creon and his daughter are dead and that a fire which cannot be extinguished with fire is destroying Corinth. The effects of the poisoning in Seneca's version can be found in Medea's speech where she is brewing the poison and adding her spells detailing what the effects of the poison should look like. The murder of the two children is also different, for in Euripides, Medea kills the children

before Jason arrives. In Seneca, Medea kills the one boy first, and his cries can be heard from inside the house. When Jason appears, she is on the top of the house with the body of the one boy while holding the other boy, whom she then kills in front of Jason. With regards to the motives found in Seneca's version of *Medea*, they appear to be the same as in Euripides' version. For in Seneca's version, the motives of Medea is also that of anger, but hate is also a motive that appears in the tragedy. Medea is angry with Jason for disregarding their vows as well as Creon for exiling her. She also hates Creon's daughter for taking Jason away from her. However, the ulterior motive appears stronger than the motives, which is pettiness. For Medea kills Creon's daughter and her own two children so that Jason will suffer the most as well as be alone. Thus, to conclude, although these murders also appear to be executions based on the background of Chapter 2, the murders come across as petty murders. Even though the motives appear to be valid, the ulterior motive is superior and surpasses the motives. Clytemnestra and Medea are driven by anger, but pettiness becomes the main motive.

## 5. Conclusion

The current research study aimed to address the murders found in their various literary context as well as different literature, with the intention of determining the reasons for the murders that were committed. The study aimed to solve the problem of researching the motives behind the murders found in both the classical tragedies and selected texts from the New Testament and whether pettiness was involved in the motives or reasons. A few motives were highlighted based on preliminary readings of the selected tragedies and New Testament texts.

The second background, which was the background chapter of this study, was used effectively throughout the study to show what the punishment methods were originally used for and how the meaning changed in the texts. It gives a better understanding of why certain methods were used when one reads about punishments in the New Testament. Furthermore, by getting a better understanding of the methods of punishment that were at the order of the day, one understands the reasons for stoning, beheading and crucifixion better. A knowledge of the general themes used in the Greek tragedies gives a better insight into themes later used in the Latin tragedies, which led to public spectacles of death as entertainment and later as punishment. Thus, the general knowledge of the Roman theatre becomes important, for the public executions were based on plays or performances where criminals were used instead of actors.

The third chapter looked at the murders found in the New Testament. The murders that were discussed were the beheading of John the Baptist, the crucifixion of Jesus and the stoning of Stephen. These murders were found in the respective Gospels, namely Mark, Matthew, Luke and Acts. Each text was translated from ancient Greek into English and then the sections that revealed a possible motive and a possible reason for why the murder, or execution, was committed, were analysed. The method of each murder, namely beheading, crucifixion and stoning, was analysed with the information from the background chapter, Chapter Two. By understanding the origin and background of each method of execution, a better understanding can be gained from the murders found in the New Testament. The motives were also made clear in the texts and several motives were highlighted. These motives include anger, hate, jealousy, treason, and fear. Although some of the motives that were found were common to each murder, there were other motives present that did not factor into all the murders. The beheading of John the Baptist presents anger, hate, revenge, and fear. Herodias is the driving force behind the execution of John the Baptist, since he says that it is against the law to marry the wife of one's brother. Thus, on account of this, Herodias becomes angry at John the Baptist

and wants him dead. Her motives for his death are anger, hate and revenge. Nevertheless, fear is also a motive, for Herod feared John, knowing that he had a large crowd of followers. The crucifixion of Jesus also presents anger as one of the motives; however, the other motives include treason and the Jewish leaders feeling threatened by Jesus and His preaching. Treason was due to the Roman emperor expecting the citizens to worship him as a god, and this idea went against the teachings of Jesus. Furthermore, this angered the Romans, and the Jewish leaders were also angered by the large number of followers that followed Jesus and listened to His teachings. The large number of followers that Jesus had also caused jealousy in the Jewish leaders, not only due to the large number of followers but also because they did not understand His teachings. Another motive that is tied in with them not understanding the teachings of Jesus is fear, for, in general, people fear that which they do not understand. The stoning of Stephen also reveals a few motives. These motives include anger and hate. The Sanhedrin and other people are angry at Stephen's revelations and speech, and they hate him for it, since it appears as if he is speaking out against the temple. However, although there are real motives displayed in the texts, the ulterior motive is presented as a stronger motive than the other motives. The ulterior motive, namely pettiness, appears to be the driving force behind the execution of each murder. *Damnatio memoriae* also plays a role in the murders, for these murders are committed in such a humiliating and gruesome way, for the punishers try to erase the memory of John the Baptist, Jesus and Stephen.

The fourth and final chapter discussed the murders found in the ancient Greek and Latin tragedies. The two Greek tragedies were written by two of the founding fathers of tragedies, namely Euripides and Aeschylus. The two tragedies that were analysed and discussed were *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus and *Medea* by Euripides. The Latin tragedies were written by Seneca the Younger, who was also a philosopher. His tragedies that were analysed and discussed were *Agamemnon* and *Medea*. Although the Latin tragedies are similar to the original Greek tragedies, there are a considerable number of significant differences between the Greek and Latin versions. The murders were analysed based on the information found in the tragedies as well as information found in the background chapter, namely the second chapter. The motives were made clear early in each tragedy and some forms of the motives became stronger, which became the sole reason for revenge, and also for murder. For Clytemnestra, in both the Greek and Latin versions, her motives are anger and jealousy. She is angry at Agamemnon for sacrificing Iphigeneia, their daughter, before leaving to start the war with Troy. She kept this anger brewing during the time he was away and planned her revenge during those ten years.



She is also jealous, because when Agamemnon returned from the war, he brings his mistress home with him. However, Cassandra is not only his mistress, but also a prisoner of war. Clytemnestra is afraid that Cassandra will take her place and replace her as queen of Argos. However, her anger at Agamemnon is greater than jealousy, and as she plans his murder along with her lover, Aegisthus. For Medea, in both the Greek and Latin versions, her motives were also anger and jealousy. She is angry with Jason for casting her aside for a new bride, namely the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth. She is also angry with Creon for exiling her from Corinth due to fear. He is afraid of what Medea might do. Medea is also jealous of Creon's daughter, as she is taking away the one that Medea loves the most and replaces her. However, both Clytemnestra and Medea take their revenge further than is needed, and their motives are replaced with the ulterior motive, namely pettiness. The murder of Agamemnon is considered as a petty murder, for Clytemnestra traps him like a wild animal in a net and kills him when he is most vulnerable. His murder is seen as petty, for his death was a response to spitefulness. He sacrifices their daughter and leaves without facing any consequences, so she kills him in retaliation for that sacrifice. The murder of Creon, his daughter and the two sons of Jason and Medea can be considered petty killings, as they are driven by jealousy.

To refer back to the first chapter, namely the Introduction, and by focusing on the sub-heading '1.2 Statement of the Problem and Research Questions', the research questions can be answered based on the outcome of the current research study. Pettiness as an ulterior motive makes its appearance in the murders found in both the New Testament and the classical tragedies. There are three research questions consisting of two primary research questions and one secondary research questions. The questions that will be answered are the following:

1. Were the murders that the tragedian and New Testament authors wrote about, a result of religious sacrifice or pettiness?
2. Can revenge as a motive for these murders in both the tragedies and the New Testament be part of the reason?
  - 2.1. Does emotion play a role as part of the circumstances leading up to murder?

The first question is related to the result of each murder, in other words whether the murder is because of a religious sacrifice or whether the murder can be categorised as a petty murder. The murders of the New Testament contain a religious aspect. John the Baptist's murder can be seen as a result of pettiness, for it is the result of Herodias' anger and Herod's fear. However, there is not enough information regarding the exact moment of death, which involves how John

the Baptist's reaction to the news that he is about to be executed and whether he accepts or rebels against the order. Thus, it is not clear whether one can see the death of John the Baptist as a result of a religious sacrifice. Nonetheless, it appears that his death is the direct result of pettiness. The crucifixion of Jesus and the stoning of Stephen are both the result of a religious sacrifice. The crucifixion and the stoning are both religious sacrifices, in the sense that these two figures are murdered because of the religion they preach. They both accept their fate, which is to be killed for their beliefs. With reference to the tragedies, and specifically the murders of Agamemnon, Creon and his daughter, and Medea's two children, they are clearly not the result of religious sacrifices. The murders found in the classical tragedies are all the result of petty jealousy and revenge. With reference to the second question, these murders all indicate revenge as motive. To answer the final question, strong emotions plays a role that leads to the murders in both the New Testament and the classical tragedies.

To reiterate the connection between chapter three and chapter four is to go back to the problem. The problem set out for this study was to identify the motives behind the murders. In order to identify and understand the motives, analyses of the murders had to be completed. Furthermore, to understand the methods used for the murders of the New Testament, knowledge of the ancient cultures is needed, for instance, why was the condemned beheaded rather than stabbed with a sword? One can ask instead if the crime justifies the punishment. The classical tragedies, along with their background, help to understand the murders of the New Testament better. By better understanding the means and methods of the murders, the motives become clearer and easier to identify and understand.

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