

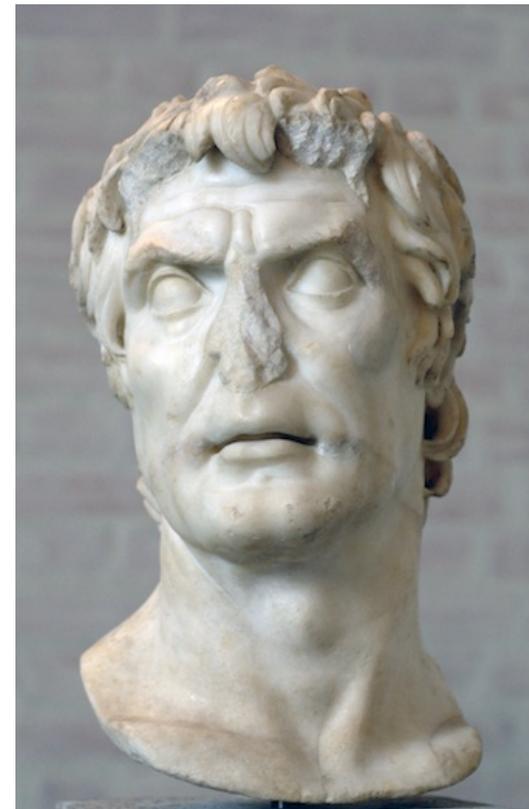
Trauma as a Social Experience – Remembering Sulla’s Atrocities

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1. Lucius Cornelius Sulla (138-78 BC)

- Born in 138 BC into a Patrician family of lesser rank
- Contemporary of Cicero and Caesar, who were born about 35 years later
- First Roman general to conquer his native city with his legions
- Victorious in the Civil War of 83/82 BC
- Invented the proscriptions (82/81 BC)
- Died in 78 BC



2. Sulla's Atrocities after the Civil War of 83/82 BC

- 1 Nov 82 BC Rome Sulla prevails at the Colline Gate
- 3 Nov 82 BC Rome Massacre in the Villa Publica ~7000 victims
- Nov 82 BC Italy "License to kill" for Sulla's 23 legions 9000+ victims
- Nov 82 BC Praeneste Mass execution with a total of 12,000 victims
- 82/81 BC Italy Sulla's proscriptions 4700 victims

➔ Sulla ordered the killing of more than 30,000 Romans.

3a. Remembering Sulla: Valerius Maximus (~30AD)

Val. Max. 9.2.1:

[...] once Sulla had acquired his victories, he acted like Hannibal.

[...] He cruelly flooded the entire city [of Rome] and every part of Italy with rivers of our citizens' blood.

[...] Four legions from the opposite side had trusted his word, but he had them all beheaded in the Villa Publica on the Campus Martius, as they vainly implored the mercy of his perfidious right hand.

The ears of the trembling community took in their lamentable cries

[...] 5000 men of Praeneste were lured outside the walls of their city, because P. Cethegus assured them of their safety.

When they threw away their arms and lay flat on the ground,

Sulla had them killed and had their bodies scattered over the countryside.

3b. Remembering Sulla: Valerius Maximus (~30AD)

Val. Max. 9.2.1 (continued)

4700 were slaughtered by an edict of dire proscriptions;
he entered them in public records, presumably to make sure
that the memory of so splendid a feat should not be washed away.

[...] How cruelly indeed he behaved towards the praetor [Marius] Gratidianus.

[...] He actually slew M. Plaetorius on the spot,
because he had fainted away at the execution of Marius Gratidianus.

He punished the new crime of pity;
for Sulla, looking reluctantly at a crime was to commit one.

(translation: D.R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb edition, adapted)

4. Jeffrey C. Alexander on Cultural Trauma

“Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.
[...]

This identity revision means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid, but deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self.”

(Alexander 2004, 1)

5a. Alexander's "Social Process of Cultural Trauma"

- (1) A horrendous event causes individual trauma in members of a society.
- (2) The grave consequences of the horrendous event for both individuals and the society at large motivate members of said society to form carrier groups.
- (3) Carrier groups initiate social mediation and lobby to win over a majority to share the burden of dealing with the effects of the horrendous event.
- (4) A key success factor in the socially mediated process of cultural trauma is to establish a succinct master narrative of the horrendous event.
- (5) ... (continued on next slide)

5b. Alexander's "Social Process of Cultural Trauma"

... (continued from the previous slide)

- (5) The master narrative of a horrendous event explicates
 - (i) the perpetrators and their violation of fundamental social values
 - (ii) the victims and their suffering
 - (iii) the severe consequences for affected individuals and the society.
- (6) A "Working Through" in "public arenas" is carried out (political, legal, ...).
- (7) Re-remembering of the horrendous event in institutionalized forms concludes the social process and establishes cultural trauma.

6. Cultural Trauma and Cultural Memory

Cultural Memory according to Aleida and Jan Assmann:

“Cultural memory encompasses
the body of permanently re-enacted texts, images and rites
specific to each society and epoch
that is maintained to stabilize and reflect the self-perception of a society.

This body of permanently re-enacted texts, images and rites
represents a society’s collective knowledge,
primarily (but not exclusively) of the past,
conveying a society’s common understanding of unity and originality.”

(Assmann J. 1988, 16; translation Alexandra Eckert)

7. Sulla's Atrocities as a Cultural Trauma

- Sulla's atrocities constituted an unprecedented horrendous event
- Sulla had violated fundamental values of the Roman society
- In Sulla's case we can identify
 - (i) carrier groups
 - (ii) key elements of the master narrative
 - (iii) "working through" in the political and legal arena (70ies, 60ies BC)
- The Romans established Sulla's atrocities as a cultural trauma
- Elements of the master narrative became part of Roman cultural memory and were remembered for centuries to come
- Valerius Maximus' depiction of Sulla's atrocities is a comprehensive and succinct account of key elements of the master narrative

8. Individual vs. Cultural Trauma – Cultural Memory

- ➔ Individual trauma is an immediate and mostly inevitable consequence when human beings have experienced a horrendous event
- ➔ To the contrary, cultural trauma depends on social mediation within a society and thus is not an inevitable, but a potential outcome of a horrendous event
- ➔ Cultural trauma will be the consequence of a horrendous event, if and only if members of a society can convince a majority of said society to both
 - (i) acknowledge the relevance of the horrendous event for the society at large
 - (ii) successfully conclude the stages of the social process of cultural trauma
- ➔ Reshaping cultural identity and re-remembering cultural trauma can be understood as integrating a horrendous event into cultural memory
- ➔ The main motivation to perform the social process of cultural trauma and to maintain a horrendous event as part of cultural memory is to prevent such grave violation of social values from ever occurring again

Select Bibliography (1)

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Reference for the picture on Slide 1:

Presumed head of Sulla from the Glyptothek in Munich (Inv. No. 309)

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Sulla_Glyptothek_Munich_309.jpg