

In his well-known treatise *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz indicates that war is first defined as the unmoderated use of violence with the ultimate goal of eliminating the enemy.<sup>1</sup> The activity of war does indeed leave a mass of bodies in its wake. However, both this century and the previous one remind us that these remains were not only those of soldiers working for regular armies. There were also collateral victims and those who died with weapons at the ready, either as regular soldiers or as unlawful combatants, killed in battle or as they were going about their everyday military activities. Regardless of how they died, a large number of bodies had to be dealt with by survivors.

Today, we know full well that the history of war involves levels of violence pre-dating the carnage of the First World War. This special issue therefore continues to explore the concept of the 'forensic turn', described by Élisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus as resulting from the combination of forensic doctors and experts in forensic science arriving in theatres of mass violence where there are clear political, social and diplomatic stakes.

The articles in this issue take a multidisciplinary approach that combines biological anthropology, social anthropology and history in examining the handling of the cartloads of human remains scattered across battlefields, concentrated in mass graves, buried under rubble or preserved in forensic facilities.

A long-term perspective, which is given precedence here, based on a wide range of contexts allows us to connect the evolution of war with changes in how dead bodies resulting from war are handled. The articles in this issue focus in particular on the construction of forensic expertise that developed in the immediate aftermath of battle as well as over time, through the examination of the bodies of allies and enemies, adults and children, men and women. The articles are presented in chronological order and sketch out a diachronic discussion based on cross-functional issues.

Using the biological archives of soldiers who died during the siege of Turin in 1706, Martina Mercinelli and Martin J. Smith begin this issue by analysing, at a remove of two centuries, the human remains of soldiers who fell on a field of battle at the beginning of the eighteenth century. But dying in a military context was not just caused by wounds inherent to combat. Armies also had to handle the corpses of those who had died from epidemics (Benoît Pouget) or the human remains of

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soldiers who had died in major accidents (Thomas Vaisset). Following the development of airborne weapons, the twentieth century saw death delivered from the sky. Antonius Robben studies this aspect by examining the civilian German and Allied victims of the bombings of the port city of Rotterdam during the Second World War. His article contributes to the study of wartime losses related to the destruction of material culture. Finally, two more contemporary contexts present how human remains have been handled during irregular or low-intensity conflicts. These contributions also open up more distant geographical perspectives, taking us beyond the European continent. Walter Bruyère-Ostells reports on the treatment of the remains of French mercenaries killed in operations in Africa between 1960 and 1989, and Suhad Daher-Nashif sets out the issues surrounding the use of forensic medical expertise within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This special issue continues to build on Reinhart Koselleck's claim that 'there is no history which could be constituted independently of the experiences and expectations of active human agents'.<sup>2</sup> In the pages that follow, the human remains resulting from the activity of war can thus be said to testify to a multitude of experiences of death as well to reveal the relationship that our societies, both present and past, have with their dead.

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## Notes

Translated from French and edited by Cadenza Academic Translations.

- 1 C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. M. Howard and P. Paret (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989).
- 2 R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. K. Tribe (New York, Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 256.