On a krater interred in a grave in Southern Italy, mourners are depicted gathered around a funerary stele transformed into the composite body of a warrior. A shield rests against its base, a fillet encircles its middle, and, crowning the rectangular prism, empty eyes stare out from a peculiarly positioned bronze helmet — or is that a skull? Not content with merely standing in for or commemorating the absent deceased, this monument positions the dead between the human and the non-human, insisting upon the material reality of the corpse as it remains present in the ground, transformed by the processes of decay.

This panel seeks to push beyond the traditional dichotomy that funerary art is limited to anticipating an inevitable afterlife or commemorating an absent deceased. Instead, we ask how ancient Mediterranean funerary art socio-materially transformed the dead into something "significantly other." The corpse presents a particular challenge to capacious notions of personhood and to distinctions between bodies and objects. Recently, the materiality of the corpse has emerged as a prime animating principle in treatments of Greek and Roman funerary art; in this panel we seek to further explore the corpse's apparently paradoxical dual status as both object of care and social agent, as dead yet vibrant matter. How can recognizing art’s ability to construct non-human personhoods across the geographic, temporal, and cultural range of the ancient Mediterranean open new modes of understanding both broader artistic trends and the contingent, intertwined relationships between the human and the more-than-human world?