

# GSEM 619 Death and Beyond: Ancient Greece and the Near East

Monday 1.10-4.00pm, Carpenter Library 13

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## Required Texts:

- Hertz, Robert, *Death and the Right Hand*. Translated by Rodney and Claudia Needham. Aberdeen: Cohen and West, 1960
- van Gennep, Arnold, *Rites of Passage*, trans. M.B. Vizedom & G. L. Caffee, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1960.

## Course Description:

The question of what happens after the moment of death has always fascinated humanity - at one moment there is a living person, the next only a corpse; where did the person go? Every culture struggles with these questions of death and afterlife - what does it mean to die and what happens after death? This seminar will examine a variety of types of evidence - archaeological, poetic, and philosophical - to uncover ideas of death and afterlife in some of the cultures of the ancient world, with particular attention to the similarities and differences between ideas of death and beyond in the cultures of the ancient Near East and Greece. Van Gennep's model of death as a *rite de passage* provides the basic structure for the class, which is divided into three sections, each concerned with one section of the transition: *Dying* - leaving the world of the living; *Liminality* - the transition between the worlds; and *Afterlife* - existence after death. This anthropological model allows us to analyze the different discourses about death and afterlife.

In the first section (*Dying*), we will first look at ideas of death itself. One of the fundamental dichotomies in human culture is the split between mortal and immortal, and death can thus be seen as an essential part of being human. We will examine ideas of when and how a human being should or could die, as well as what happens in the process of dying and how that fits into larger cosmological ideas. By exploring mortuary demography, we will also consider how textual materials complement or contradict patterns from the archaeological record. What, for example, can age at death profiles tell us about life expectancy, disease and who was actually dying in the ancient world.

The next section of the course (*Liminality*) will examine the transition of the deceased into the world of the dead, from the perspective of both the deceased and of the living community. We will explore the various types of funeral rituals performed by the relatives and mourners of the deceased in different periods, paying special attention to the roles of women and the ways the community regulates funeral behavior. We will look at the ways in which the journey of the deceased from the realm of the living to the dead is imagined, focusing particularly on the obstacles in the journey and the consequences of a failed transition - monsters and ghosts. These discussions will be complemented by a consideration of what happens to a human body following death and the ways in which humans may have deliberately attempted to keep the deceased within a liminal phase.

The final section of the course (*Afterlife*) will deal with the stage after death, again from the perspective of both the deceased and the living. We will explore visions of the afterlife throughout Near Eastern and Greek literature and art, focusing particularly on the changing topography of the underworld and the privileges and punishments reserved for different types in the mystery religions and philosophical

schools. This section will also include a study of the various kinds of rituals performed by the living for the dead, ranging from tendance at the tomb to hero cult.

The class will read selections from a variety of primary sources in translation and also interrogate primary archaeological data, along with some secondary sources, including archaeological, anthropological, and historical. Most of these readings will be available on Moodle or on reserve in Carpenter. Each week several students will be responsible for leading discussion on the special topics; these students will have additional readings to enrich their understanding of the topics (although all students are welcome to do these readings if time permits).

In addition to discussion in the seminar, each student will produce a substantial research paper on a topic chosen in consultation with one or both of the professors. A detailed proposal and preliminary bibliography will be due in the week before fall break. Every student will give a brief presentation of the research project in the second to last week of the semester, and the final papers will be due in the exam period.

### Seminar Schedule

#### **Week 1: September 6 1.45-4.00 pm Introduction**

##### **Topics:**

- Death and Dying
- Afterlife and the community
- Ancient Greece and the Near East

##### **Readings:**

- (Hertz 1960), *Death and the Right Hand*
- (Van Gennep 1960), *Rites of Passage*
- Scheffler 2013, *Death and Afterlife*

## Section 1: Dying

#### **Week 2: September 11 Death in the ancient Near East: Dying - Who Dies? When and How?**

##### **Topics:**

- Who Dies? When and How?
- Mortals vs. Immortals
- Good Death and Bad Death
- Mechanics of Dying

##### **Primary Readings:**

- Selection of bioarchaeology reports available on Moodle
- Dumuzid's dream and Dumuzid and Geštin-ana* (ETCSL Translation) (Black et al. 1998c; 1998d)
- Inana's descent to the nether world* (ETCSL Translation) (Black et al. 1998f)
- The death of Gilgamesh* (ETCSL Translation) (Black et al. 1998g)

##### **Secondary Readings:**

- (Duday 2009), Lecture 1. Preliminary discussion
- (Kellehear 2007), Chapter 1
- (Robb 2013), *An Archaeology of dying*
- (Seale 1998), Chapter 2

(Sibbing-Plantholt 2021), Coping with time and death  
(Tarlow 2023), Chapter 1 (note that this is a very personal chapter which may cause some distress)

### **Special Topics:**

- *Mechanics of Dying*

(Azevedo and Bitencourt Otero 2020), Human death as a triptych process

(Bauks 2016), “Soul Concepts”

(Farber 2007), L $\acute{a}$ ma $\acute{s}$ tu—Agent of a specific disease

- *Who Dies? When and How? And Good vs. Bad Death*

(Lambert 1980), Theology of Death

(Ortner and Frohlich 2007), The EB IA tombs and burials

Black et al. 1998c), *Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world* (ETCSL Translation) (Black et al. 1998e)

- *Mortals vs. Immortals*

(George 2009), *The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablets X and XI*

(Black et al. 1998f). *Inana's descent to the nether world* (ETCSL Translation)

(Black et al. 1998g), *The death of Gilgameš* (ETCSL Translation)

## **Week 3: September 18 Death in Greece: Dying - Who Dies? When and How?**

### **Topics:**

- Mortals vs. Immortals

- Good Death and Bad Death

- Mechanics of Dying – departure of the psyche, dissolution of elements

### **Primary Readings:**

Plato, *Phaedo*

Hesiod, *Works and Days*

Lyric Poets: Callinus, Tyrtaeus, Semonides, Mimnermus, and Solon

Homer, *Iliad* xvi, xxii

Herodotus I.30-33 (Solon)

Stobaeus, On Death

### **Secondary Readings:**

Edmonds (forthcoming) What is Death?

Garland, ch. 1-2

Johnston 1999, ch.1

Vermeule 1979, ch. 1 & 3

Sourvinou-Inwood 1981, To Die and Enter the House of Hades

Humphreys 1980, Death and Time

### **Special Topics:**

- *Mortals vs. Immortals*

Vernant 1991, Mortals and Immortals ch 1

Loraux 1995, Therefore Socrates is Immortal

- *Good Death and Bad Death*

Simonides on the Battle of Plataea

Vernant 1991, A Beautiful Death ch 2

Vernant 1991, *Panta kala* ch 4

- *Mechanics of Dying*

Bremmer 1983, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* ch. 1-2

Vernant 1991, *Psyche* ch 10

## Section 2: Liminality

### Week 4: September 25 Liminality for the Community in the Near East: The Funeral Ritual and Mourning

#### Topics:

- Ritual for the community
- Funeral rituals and burial practices in different periods
  - Burial and disposal methods
  - Providing for the dead: Grave goods and their meaning
  - The role of sacrifice

#### Primary Readings:

Please choose one site/listing from the selected archaeological reports below available on Moodle/via Dr Bradbury/in Carpenter Library-each group (2-3 persons per group) will be responsible for reporting back with a very short summary of the burial methods used at each of the sites (and time periods) under discussion.

1. (Kenyon 1960; 1965), Jericho Volume I and II (Proto-Urban (EB I) Tombs only)
2. (Ortner and Frohlich 2008; Schaub and Rast 1989), Bab edh Dhra
3. (Kenyon 1960; 1965), Jericho Volume I and II (Intermediate Bronze Age (EB IV) Tombs only)
4. (Schwartz et al. 2006; Woolley 1934), The Tombs at Ur and Umm el-Marra (Early Dynastic and EB IV)
5. (Kenyon 1960; 1965), Jericho Volume I and II (MBA Tombs only)
6. (Doumet-Serhal 2004; Levy and Kletter 2018a; 2018b), Rishon le-Zion and Sidon (MBA)
7. (Morandi Bonacossi 2011; Pfälzner 2012), Qatna (MBA-LBA)

(George 2009), *The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet VIII*  
(Black et al. 1998h), *The death of Ur-Namma* (ETCSL Translation)

#### Secondary Readings:

(Bradbury in press), Remembering and Forgetting  
(Laneri 2007), An archaeology of funerary rituals  
(Robb 2007), Burial Treatment

#### Special Topics:

- *Providing for the dead: Grave goods and their meaning*  
(Archi 2002), Jewels for the Ladies of Ebla  
(Baker 2012), The Funeral Kit, ch 2 and 3  
(Ekengren 2013), Theorizing Grave Goods
- *Corpse Disposal and Preservation-what constitutes a proper burial?*  
(Ilan 2002), Mortuary Practices in Early Bronze Age Canaan  
(Pfälzner 2012), How did they bury the Kings of Qatna  
(Richardson 2007), Death and Dismemberment
- *The role of sacrifice*  
(Porter 2012), Mortal Mirrors  
(Schwartz 2017), The archaeological study of sacrifice

## Week 5: October 2 Liminality for the Community in Greece: The Funeral Ritual and Mourning

### Topics:

- Ritual for the community
- Miasma and Purification
- Funeral ritual in different periods
  - Funeral components – burial vs. cremation, offerings, lamentation
  - Funeral Legislation – community regulates its rituals, the role of women
- Parallels between funeral ritual and marriage ritual
  - Assimilation of the transitions in myth
  - the case of Persephone at Locri

### Primary Readings:

Homer, *Iliad* xxiv. 693-803

*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Lucian *On Funerals*

Funerary laws from Iulis on Keos CGRN 3355

Funeral legislation references: Demosthenes 43.57-66 & Plato, *Laws* 958d-960b; Plutarch, *Life of Solon*; Cicero, *de legibus* 2.55-69

### Secondary Readings

Garland, ch. 3; 4

Kurtz and Boardman 1971, ch. vii; xi

Alexiou 1974, *The Ritual Lament* ch. 1

Johnston 1999, ch. 2

Vermeule 1979, ch. 5

### Special Topics:

#### - *Miasma and Purification*

Parker 1983, *Miasma* ch. 1-2, Cyrene Appendix

Lex Sacra from Selinous

#### - *Funeral ritual in different periods*

Sourvinou-Inwood 1983, A Trauma in Flux; Appendix to *Reading Greek Death*

Morris 1989, Attitudes toward Death in Archaic Greece

Nilsson Stutz 2015, A Proper Burial

#### - *Lamentation*

Alexiou 1974, *Ritual Lament* ch. 7-9 (on reserve in Carpenter)

Hame 2008, Female Control

#### - *Funeral Legislation*

Garland 1989, The well-ordered corpse

Stears 2008, Death Becomes Her

Toher 1991, Greek funerary legislation and the two Spartan funerals

#### - *Marriage and Death*

Seaford 1987, The Tragic Wedding

Rehm 1994, *Marriage to Death*, ch 1-2

Sourvinou-Inwood 1978, Persephone and Aphrodite at Locri

Redfield 2003, Locrian Maidens

## **Week 6: October 9 Liminality for the Deceased in the Near East and Greece: The Journey and its Perils**

### **Topics:**

- the journey – directions
- obstacles to the journey – need for burial, the water barrier, special knowledge

### **Primary Readings:**

- ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets
- Aristophanes, *Frogs*
- Plato, *Phaedo*
- (Kramer 1967), The Death of Ur Nammu
- (Archi 2008), *KBo 22.178 + KUB 48.109 + 43.60 (CTH 457)* in “The soul has to leave the land of the living”

### **Secondary Readings**

- Bernabé 2015, What is a katabasis?
- Edmonds 2004, The Start of the Journey
- Garland, ch. 4
- (Katz 2003), ch. 1 and 2

### **Special Topics:**

- *obstacles to the journey in the Orphic Gold Tablets*
  - Edmonds 2004, Roadmaps of Déviance
  - Johnston 2007, Ritual Texts
- *what is required for the journey-a “descent” to the underworld in Mesopotamia*
  - (George 1985), Inanna's Descent
  - (Kramer 1937), Inanna's Descent to the Nether World
  - (Kramer 1967), The Death of Ur-Nammu
- *katabasis – the genre of the journey*
  - Edmonds 2015, When I walked the dark road of Hades
  - Gazis 2015, The Nekyia's Catalogue of Heroines
  - Herrero 2015, Traditions of catabatic experience

## **Week 7: October 14-22 Fall Break**

## **Week 8: October 23 Liminality for the Deceased in the Near East and Greece: Failed Transitions and Ghosts**

### **Topics:**

- Failed transitions – the fate of the unburied, unmarried, or untimely dead, Lamia and other female demons
- the use of ghosts – necromancy, defixiones

### **Primary Readings:**

- Odyssey* 10-11, 24
- Necromancy in *Kestos* of Julius Africanus & Aeschylus' *Persians*
- Pausanias IX.39 on the Trophonius Oracle

Plutarch, *de genio Socratis* 589f-592f  
Ghost Magic from Greece

**Secondary Readings:**

(Finkel 2020), *The First Ghosts*  
Johnston 1999, ch. 3  
Vermeule 1979, ch. 6  
(Weiss-Krejci 2013), *The Unburied Dead*

**Special Topics:**

- *failed transitions – demons and the restless dead*  
Johnston 2001, *Defining the Dreadful*  
Smith 1976, *Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers*  
(Scurlock 2016), *Mortal and immortal souls, ghosts*
- *the use of ghosts – necromancy, defixiones*  
Faraone 1991, *Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil*  
Faraone 2005, *Necromancy Goes Underground*  
(Finkel 1983), *Necromancy in Ancient Mesopotamia*  
Ogden 2001, *Necromancy*  
(Scurlock 1995), *Magical uses of Ancient Mesopotamian Festivals*

## Section 3: Afterlife

### Week 9: October 30 Beyond: After Death in the Near East – the community regroups.

**Topics:**

- secondary burial practices
- epitaphs, laments and elegies
- visiting the tomb and continued providing for the dead (Kispu(m))

**Primary Readings:**

(Black et al. 1998a), *An elegy on the death of Nannaya*  
(Black et al. 1998b), *An elegy on the death of Navirtum*  
(Niehr 2012), *Two Stelae*

**Secondary Readings:**

(Bradbury in prep), *Challenging the Normative*, ch. 4  
(Brunke 2011), *Feasting*  
(Cradic 2021), *Sensing the ancestors*  
(Löhnert 2011), *Manipulating the gods*  
(Metcalf and Huntington 1991), *Celebrations of death*, ch. 4  
(Pfälzner 2016), *Royal Corpses*

**Special Topics:**

- *Secondary burial practices*  
(Chesson 1999), *Libraries of the Dead*  
(McMahon, Soltysiak, and Weber 2011), *Tell Brak*  
(Porter et al. 2021), *Tell Banat*
- *Kispu(m): its location and meaning*

(Barrett 2007), Was dust their food  
(Lange 2017), Evidence within  
(Tsukimoto 2010), Peace for the Dead  
- *Lamentations and elegies*  
(Löhnert 2016), Coping with death  
(Reiner 1985), Chapter V.1, An Assyrian Elegy

## **Week 10: November 6 Beyond: After Death in Greece – the community regroups.**

### **Topics:**

- secondary burial practices
- epitaphs and funeral orations
- visiting the tomb and hero cult

### **Primary Readings:**

Homer, *Iliad* xxiii-xxiv  
Thucydides 2.33-46, Pericles' Funeral Oration  
Lysias Funeral Oration  
Demosthenes Funeral Oration  
Hyperides Funeral Oration  
Plato, *Menexenus*

### **Secondary Readings**

Kurtz and Boardman 1971 ch. xii; xiv  
Garland, ch.7  
Lattimore 1942, Themes in Greek & Latin Epitaphs  
Parker 2005, Ancestral Gods, Ancestral Tombs

### **Special Topics:**

- *funeral orations*
  - Loraux 1986, Address to the Dead
  - Shear 2013, Their Memories Will Never Grow Old
  - Tyrrell & Burnett 1999, Pericles' Muting of Women's Voices in Thuc. 2.45.2
- *epitaphs*
  - Meyer 1993, Epitaphs and Citizenship
  - Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, *Reading Greek Death* ch. 3
- *visiting the tomb*
  - Humphreys 1980b, Family Tombs & Tomb Cult
  - Oakley, Picturing Death in Classical Athens (book on reserve in Carpenter)
  - Shapiro 1991, The Iconography of Mourning
- *hero cult*
  - Antonaccio 1994, Contesting the Past
  - Ekroth 2007, Heroes and Hero-Cults
  - Rohde 1925, *Psyche* ch.iv
  - Whitely 1995, Tomb and hero cult in Archaic Greece
- *funeral games*
  - Brown 2003, Homer, funeral contests and the origins of the Greek city
  - Grethlein 2007, Epic Narrative and Ritual. The Case of the Funeral Games in *Iliad* 23
  - Roller 1981, Funeral Games for Historical Persons



## **Week 11. November 13 Beyond: Afterlife in the Near East – The Netherworld, Remembrance and Ancestors**

### **Topics:**

- the afterlife and different conceptions
- Memory, Identity and Ancestors
- Death, Time, and Transformation

### **Primary Readings:**

(Black et al. 1998i), Sumerian King's List  
(Lambert 2014), Enuma Elish Tablet V and VI

### **Secondary Readings:**

(Assmann 2010), Re-framing memory  
(Lucas 2005), Ch. 3  
(Whitley 2002), Too many ancestors

### **Special Topics:**

- *the changing nature of the netherworld*  
(Katz 2003), ch. 5  
(Lundström 2013), Chaos and Creation
- *Remembrance and Forgetting: Becoming an Ancestor(s)*  
(Lange 2012), Food and Libation Offerings  
(Lange 2014), The Next Level
- *Death, Time, and Transformation*  
(Croucher 2006), Death, Display and Performance (this focuses on the Neolithic, which is outside of our main periods of interest but reveals several interesting points regarding time and human remains)  
(Peltenburg 2007), Enclosing the Ancestors  
(Schwartz 2013), Umm el Marra

## **Week 12: November 20 Beyond: Afterlife in Greece – Topography of the Underworld**

### **Topics:**

- the changing location of the underworld – Elysium, Isles of the Blest, Hades
- the nature of life in the afterlife
- privilege and punishment
- Mystery Cults and Salvation
- Eleusinian Mysteries and Orphism
- Symposia of the Blest

### **Primary Readings:**

Pindar *Olympian* II & Dirges  
'Orphic' Gold Tablets  
Plato: myths from *Phaedo* (107c-115b) and *Gorgias* (523a-527e);  
Pausanias X.28-31 on Polygnotos (cp. Frazer's commentary)  
Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead*  
Plutarch *de sera numinis vindicta*

### **Secondary Readings**

Edmonds 2015, *Imagining the Afterlife*

Garland, ch. 5, 6  
Vermeule 1979, ch. 2

**Special Topics:**

- *post-mortem punishment*
  - Burkert 2009, Pleading for Hell
  - Saunders 1991, Anxieties and Surrogates
- *Mystery Cults and Salvation*
  - Burkert 1987, Mystery Cults
  - Redfield 1991, The Politics of Immortality
- *Orphism*
  - Parker 1995, Early Orphism
  - Edmonds 2008, Extra-ordinary People
- *Philosophical Consolations*
  - [Plato] *Axiochus*
  - Plutarch, *Consolatio ad Apollonium*
  - Boys-Stones 2013, *The Consolatio ad Apollonium: Therapy for the Dead*

**Week 13: November 27 Beyond the Afterlife: Reincarnation or Nothing?**

**Topics:**

- Alternatives to the Underworld
- The fragmentary body
- Atomism and the afterlife
- Ethicization of reincarnation

**Primary Readings:**

Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Empedokles & Pythagoras  
Plato on reincarnation: selections from *Republic & Phaedrus*  
Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, book III  
Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus*

**Secondary Readings:**

Edmonds 2013, *Life in the Afterlife*  
(Fowler 2016), *Relational personhood*  
Henry 2009, Introduction (xvi-xxii) *Epicurean Ideas of Death*  
Long 1948, *A Study of the Doctrine of Metempsychosis*  
Obeyesekere 2002, *Eschatology In Greek And Rebirth Soteriology*

**Special Topics:**

- *pre-ethicized reincarnation*
  - Obeyesekere, *Imagining Karma* (online in Tripod)
- *Epicurean philosophy and death*
  - Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecius*
  - Philodemus *On Death* (on reserve in Carpenter)
  - Warren, *Facing death: Epicurus and his critics* (on reserve in Carpenter)
- *The fragmentary body*
  - (Bradbury in prep), *Challenging the normative*, ch. 4 and 9 (sections)
  - (Croucher 2010), *Bodies in pieces*
  - (Porter et al. 2021), *Tell Banat*
- *Neoplatonic ideas of reincarnation*
  - Neoplatonists on Reincarnation: excerpts from Plotinus, Proclus, et al.

Baltzly, Patriarchy, Metempsychosis and Women in the Neoplatonic Commentary  
Tradition  
[Proclus, *in Remp.* XVI]

**Week 14: December 4 Student Reports, Dorothy Vernon Room**

**Week 15: December 11 Conclusions**

**Topics:**

- Death and Dying
- Afterlife and the community
- Ancient Greece and the Near East

**Readings:**

(Arnold 2014), *Life After Life*  
(Croucher et al. 2021), *Archaeology and contemporary death*  
(Hertz 1960), *Death and the Right Hand*  
(Van Gennep 1960), *Rites of Passage*  
(Rumble 2018), *If you go down to the woods*  
Scheffler 2013, *Death and Afterlife*

## Bibliography

### Near East:

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- , trans. 1998c. "Dumuzid and Ĝeštin-Ana." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. Oxford. <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.1.1#>.
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- , trans. 1998f. "Inana's Descent to the Nether World." In *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. Oxford. <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.1#>.
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