GSEM 619: Death and Beyond

SPRING 2009

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Required Texts:


Recommended Texts:

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 Mediterranean world, with particular attention to the similarities and differences between
ideas of death and beyond in the cultures of Greece, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. 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.

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.

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 Mesopotamian, Egyptian, 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, along with some secondary sources, both anthropological and historical. Most of these readings will be available on Blackboard or on reserve in Carpenter, but some will be from the required texts for the class. 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 will be due in the week before spring break. All the student proposals will also be read by the panel of experts who will visit the class later in the semester for a cross-cultural symposium. Every student will give a brief presentation of the research project in the last two weeks of the semester, and the final papers will be due in the exam period.

**Seminar Schedule**
Week 1. Jan. 19-23 **Introduction**  
**Reading:** Van Gennep, Rites of Passage

Week 2. Jan. 26—**Death in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt**

**Mesopotamia:**  
**Primary Sources:**  
- Black et al., *Inanna’s Descent*  
- Dalley, *Ishtar’s Descent*  
- Kramer, *Death of Ur-Nammu and His Descent to the Netherworld*  
- George, *Bilgames and the Netherworld* and *The Death of Bilgames*,

**Secondary Sources:**  
- Bottéro, “The Mythology of Death”  
- Lambert, “The Theology of Death”  

**Egypt:**  
**Primary Sources:**  
- Simpson, *Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, Book of the Dead, Harper’s Song*

**Secondary Sources:**  
- Morenz, “Death and the Dead”  
- Hare, “The Reverential Slaughter”

**Presenting students also read:**  
Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 1-112

Week 3. Feb. 2-6 **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's *Phaedo*  
- Hesiod, *Works and Days*  
- Lyric Poets: Callinus, Tyrtaeus, Semonides, Mimnermus, and Solon  
- Homer's *Iliad* xvi, xxii  
- *Herodotus I*30-33 (Solon)

**Secondary Readings:**  
Garland, ch. 1-2
Week 4. Feb. 9-13 – Funerary Ritual in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt

Mesopotamia:
Pollock, “Of Priestesses, Princes, and Poor Relations”
Pollock, “Death of a Household”
Katz, “Sumerian Funerary Rituals in Context”
Richardson, “Death and Dismemberment in Mesopotamia”
For those who need background information on the Royal Tombs of Ur, Early Dynastic Period (ca. 2900-2334 BCE), see Aruz, Art of the First Cities, 93-132 [easy read lots of pictures – not on Bb but on reserve in Carpenter]

Presenting students also read:
Cohen, Death Rituals, [read up to the appendices – not on Bb]

Egypt:
D’Auria et al., Mummies and Magic
Morris, “Sacrifice for the State”

Presenting students also read:
Assmann, Death and Salvation, 299-348

Week 5. Feb. 16-20 Liminality for the Community: The Funeral Ritual in Greece

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:**
- Iliad xxiii-xxiv
- Aeschylus Libation Bearers
- Sophocles Antigone
- Homeric Hymn to Demeter
- Lucian On Mourning
- 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, ch. vii; xi
- Alexiou, The Ritual Lament ch. 1
- Johnston, ch. 2
- Vermeule, ch. V

**Special Topics:**
- Miasma and Purification
  - Parker, Miasma ch. 1-2, Cyrene Appendix
  - Lex Sacra from Selinous
- Funeral ritual in different periods
  - Sourvinou-Inwood, A Trauma in Flux; Appendix to Reading Greek Death
  - Morris, Attitudes toward Death in Archaic Greece
- Lamentation
  - Alexiou, Ritual Lament ch. 7-9 (on reserve in Carpenter)
  - Hame, Female Control
- Funeral Legislation
  - Garland, The well-ordered corpse
  - Toher, Greek funerary legislation and the two Spartan funerals
- Parallels between funeral ritual and marriage ritual in myth
  - Seaford, The Tragic Wedding
  - Rehm, Marriage to Death, ch 1-2
- Marriage to Death: the case of Persephone at Locri
  - Sourvinou-Inwood, Persephone and Aphrodite at Locri
  - Redfield, Locrian Maidens

**Week 6. Feb. 23-27** – **Transition for the Deceased**

**Mesopotamia:**

**Primary Sources:**
- George, Babylonian (Assyrian) Epic of Gilgamesh and the Sumerian Gilgamesh poems
**Dalley, Etana, Myths from Mesopotamia**
*Izre’el, Adapa and the South Wind, 1-46* [no need to read the philological notes]

Secondary Sources:
- Abusch, “Gilgamesh’s Request and Siduri’s Denial,”
- Foster, “Gilgamesh: Sex, Love and the Ascent of Knowledge.”

**Presenting students also read:**
- Liverani, “Adapa, guest of the gods.”
- *Izre’el, Adapa and the South Wind, 107-149*

**Egypt:**

Primary Source:
- Allen, *Pyramid Texts* [including the introduction]

Secondary Sources:
- Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 113-298

**Presenting students also read:**
- Dunand and Lichtenberg, *Mummies and Death in Egypt*, 1-107

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**Week 7. Mar. 2-6 Liminality for the Deceased in Greece: The Journey and its Perils**

Topics:
- the journey - directions
- obstacles to the journey - need for burial, the water barrier, special knowledge
- 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 Africanus Kestoi & Aeschylus’ *Persians*
- Pausanias IX.39 on the Trophonius Oracle
- Plutarch, *de genio* 589f-592f
- ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets
- *Aristophanes, Frogs*
- *Plato, Phaedo*

**Secondary Readings**
- Garland, ch. 4
- *Johnston, ch. 3*
- *Vermeule, ch. 6*

**Special Topics:**
- Failed transitions
  - Smith, *Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers*
  - *Johnston, Defining the Dreadful*
- obstacles to the journey in the Orphic Gold Tablets
Edmonds, Roadmaps of Déviance
Johnston, Ritual Texts
- the use of ghosts - necromancy, defixiones
   Faraone, Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil (part 1 & 2)
   Ogden, Necromancy
- Trophonius
   Betz, The Oracle of Trophonius
   Bonnecchere, Trophonius of Lebadea

Week 8. Mar. 9-13 Spring Break

Week 9. Mar. 16-20 – The Beyond in Ancient Mesopotamia
Primary Sources:
   Livingstone, Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince
For review:
   Black et al., Inanna’s Descent
   Dalley, Ishtar’s Descent
   Kramer, Death of Ur-Nammu and His Descent to the Netherworld
   George, Bilgames and the Netherworld and The Death of Bilgames, 175-208
Secondary Sources:
   Katz, Image of the Netherworld, xv-112
   Kvanvig, Roots of Apocalyptic
Presenting students also read:
Katz, Image of the Netherworld, 113-287

Week 10. Mar. 23-27 Beyond: After Death in Greece - the community regroups
Topics:
- secondary burial practices
- epitaphs and funeral orations
- visiting the tomb and hero cult
Primary Readings:
   Epitaphs from the Greek Anthology
   Thucydides 2.33-46, Pericles’ Funeral Oration
   Lysias Funeral Oration
   Demosthenes Funeral Oration
   Hyperides Funeral Oration
**Plato, Menexenus**

**Secondary Readings**
- Kurtz and Boardman ch. xii; xiv
- Garland, Ch. 7
- Lattimore, Themes in Greek & Latin Epitaphs
- Parker, Ancestral Gods, Ancestral Tombs

**Special Topics:**
- *funeral orations*
  - Loraux, Address to the Dead
  - Tyrell & Burnett, Pericles’ Muting of Women's Voices in Thuc. 2.45.2
- *epitaphs*
  - Meyer, Epitaphs and Citizenship
  - Sourvinou-Inwood, Reading Greek Death ch. 3 (part 1 & part 2)
- *visiting the tomb*
  - Humphreys Family Tombs & Tomb Cult
  - Shapiro, The Iconography of Mourning
  - Oakley, Picturing death in classical Athens (book on reserve in Carpenter)
- *hero cult*
  - Antonaccio, Contesting the Past
  - Rohde, Psyche ch.iv
- *reworking hero cult*
  - Flavius Philostratus, Heroicus
  - Dué & Nagy, On Philostratus On Heroes

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**Week 11. Mar. 30-Apr. 3 – The Beyond in Ancient Egypt**

**Primary Sources:**
  - [Not on Bb -- complete text to be read by presenting students only – other students please review the drawings and photographs in both volumes]
- Selections from *The Book of the Dead* (TBD)

**Secondary Sources:**
- Hornung, *Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*

Hornung, “The Hereafter”

**Presenting students also read:**
- Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 349-417
Week 12. Apr. 6-10 **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
- Reincarnation

**Primary Readings:**
- Pindar Olympian II & Dirges
- ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets
- Plato: myths from Phaedo and Gorgias;
- Plato: selections from Republic, Phaedrus, Phaedo
- Pausanias X.28-31 on Polynotos
- Lucian, Dialogues of the Dead
- Plutarch de sera numinis vindicta

**Secondary Readings**
- Garland, ch. 5, 6
- Vermeule, ch. ii

**Special Topics:**
- *post-mortem punishment*
  - Saunders, Anxieties and Surrogates
  - Sourvinou-Inwood, Crime and Punishment
- *Mystery Cults and Salvation*
  - Burkert, Mystery Cults
  - Redfield, The Politics of Immortality
- *Orphism*
  - Parker, Early Orphism
  - Edmonds, Extra-ordinary People
- *Reincarnation*
  - Obeyesekere, Eschatology In Greek And Rebirth Soteriology
  - Long, Metempsychosis

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Week 13. Apr. 13-17 Conclusions – Symposium

Friday, April 17 - The Restless Dead and the Perfect Tomb: A Symposium – Tzvi Abusch, Rita Freed, Sarah Iles Johnston
Saturday, April 18 – Brunch with panel of experts

Week 14. Apr. 20-24 Student Reports

Week 15. Apr. 27-May 1 Student Reports


Tom Hare, *ReMembering Osiris: Number, Gender, and the Word in Ancient Egyptian Representational Systems* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999)


Helge Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and the Son of Man* (Neukirchner Verlag, 1988)


READING LIST FOR GREECE


