GSEM 619: Death and Beyond

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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.
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
- Johnston, ch.1
- Vermeule, ch. 1 & 3
Sourvinou-Inwood, To Die and Enter the House of Hades
Humphreys, Death and Time

Special Topics:
- Mortals vs. Immortals
  Vernant, Mortals and Immortals
  Loraux, Therefore Socrates is Immortal
- Good Death and Bad Death
  Vernant, A Beautiful Death
  Vernant, Panta kala
- Mechanics of Dying
  Bremmer, The Early Greek Concept of the Soul ch. 1-2
  Vernant, Psuche

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

**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
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 Kestoj & Aeschylus' Persians
- Pausanius 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

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

Primary Sources:
Piankoff and Rambova, *Tomb of Ramesses VI* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954) ![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, “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 Polygnotos
- 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*

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
READING LIST FOR EGYPT AND MESOPOTAMIA


James P. Allen, The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, Writings from the Ancient World (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005) 1-64


Harriet Crawford, Sumer and the Sumerians (Cambridge University Press, 1994)


Sue D’Auria et al., Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1992)


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


Shlomo Izre’el, Adapa and the South Wind: Language Has the Power of Life and Death (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2001)

Dina Katz, The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 2003)


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


Alasdair Livingstone, Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea, State Archives of Assyria 3 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1989)


READING LIST FOR GREECE


