

GSem 619

Death & Beyond

Ancient Greece and China

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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 examines a variety of types of evidence - archaeological, poetic, and philosophical - to uncover ideas of death and afterlife, with particular attention to the similarities and differences between ideas of death and beyond in the cultures of ancient Greece and China. 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.