

# GSEM 619 Death and Beyond: Ancient Greece and China

Wednesday 2-4, Carpenter 15

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## Required Texts:

- Garland, Robert, *The Greek Way of Death*, Cornell University Press: New York, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2001.
- Olberding, Amy and Philip Ivanhoe, eds. *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*. Albany: SUNY, 2012.
- 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 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.

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 Chinese 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 Moodle 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 and preliminary bibliography 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 second to last week of the semester, and the final papers will be due in the exam period.

### **Seminar Schedule**

#### **Week 1. January 23 Introduction**

##### **Topics:**

Death and Dying  
Afterlife and the community  
Ancient Greece and China

##### **Readings:**

Van Gennep, Rites of Passage  
Scheffler 2013, Death and Afterlife

#### **Week 2. January 30 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)

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

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, *Psuche* ch 10

Week 3. February 6 **Death in China: Perspectives on Death**

**Topics:**

- Is there a heroic death in China?
- Good death and bad death

**Primary Readings:**

Confucius, *Analects* Book 11

Sima Qian, "Letter to Ren'an" "Biography of Boyi and Shuqi" "Biography of Nie Zheng"

Wang Chong (1962), "On Death," 191-201.

**Secondary Readings:**

Durrant (2016), Intro; Ch. 3 51-70.

Blakeley (2010)

Searchris (2008)

**Special Topics:**

- Death and Nature
  - Fraser (2013)
  - Galvany (2012)
- Good Death and Bad Death
  - Olberding (2012), Chs. 4-5
  - Mak (2001)

Week 4. February 13 **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 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 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 5. February 20 **Liminality for the Community in China: The Funeral Ritual and Mourning**

**Topics:**

- Reinforcing kinship
- Serving the Dead as if they were alive
- Filial Piety

**Primary Readings:**

- Steele (1917), vol. 2, 45-105, chapters on *shisang* and *jixi* rituals.
- Watson (2003), 115-24. Xunzi, "A Discussion of Rites"

**Secondary Readings:**

- Olberding (2008)
- Brown (2007)

**Special Topics:**

- Division of Souls
  - Brashier (1996)
- Corpse Preservation
  - Thorp (1991)
  - Brown (2002)
- Imagery of the liminal door and sexuality
  - Goldin (2001)

Week 6. February 27 **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 *Kestos* of Julius Africanus & Aeschylus' *Persians*  
 Pausanias IX.39 on the Trophonius Oracle  
 Plutarch, *de genio Socratis* 589f-592f  
 'Orphic' Gold Tablets  
 Aristophanes, *Frogs*  
 Plato, *Phaedo*

**Secondary Readings:**

Garland, ch. 4  
 Johnston 1999, ch. 3  
 Vermeule 1979, ch. 6

**Special Topics:**

- *failed transitions – demons and the restless dead*  
 Smith 1976, Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers  
 Johnston 2001, Defining the Dreadful
- *obstacles to the journey in the Orphic Gold Tablets*  
 Edmonds 2004, Roadmaps of Déviance  
 Johnston 2007, Ritual Texts
- *katabasis – the genre of the journey*  
 Bernabé 2015, What is a katabasis?  
 Edmonds 2015, When I walked the dark road of Hades  
 Gazis 2015, The Nekyia's Catalogue of Heroines  
 Herrero 2015, Traditions of catabatic experience
- *the use of ghosts - necromancy, defixiones*  
 Faraone 1991, Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil  
 Faraone 2005, Necromancy Goes Underground  
 Ogden 2001, Necromancy

Week 7. March 6 **Liminality for the Deceased in China: Posthumous Journey**

**Topics:**

- Journey after death
- Division of the souls
- Death and transformation

**Primary Readings:**

Hawkes (1985), 219-231. The chapter on "summons of the soul"

**Secondary Readings:**

Poo (1995), 157-178.  
 Yu (1987)

**Special Topics:**

- From Life to Death  
 Lai (2005)  
 Tseng (2011), 166-204.
- From Death to Life  
 Harper (1994)  
 Seidel (1987)  
 Company (1990)
- Corpse deliverance  
 Cedzich (2001)

Week 8. March 13 **Spring Break**

Week 9. March 20 **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
  - Tyrrell & Burnett 1999, Pericles' Muting of Women's Voices in Thuc. 2.45.2
  - Shear 2013, Their Memories Will Never Grow Old
- *epitaphs*
  - Meyer 1993, Epitaphs and Citizenship
  - Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, *Reading Greek Death* ch. 3
- *visiting the tomb*
  - Humphreys 1980b, Family Tombs & Tomb Cult
  - Shapiro 1991, The Iconography of Mourning
  - Oakley, Picturing Death in Classical Athens (book on reserve in Carpenter)
- *hero cult*
  - Antonaccio 1994, Contesting the Past
  - 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
  - Roller 1981, Funeral Games for Historical Persons
  - Grethlein 2007, Epic Narrative and Ritual. The Case of the Funeral Games in *Iliad* 23

Week 10. March 27 **Beyond: Afterlife in China: Specters of the Past**

**Topics:**

- Ontology of Ghosts
- The concept of underworld
- human-ghost relationship

**Primary Readings:**

- Watson (2003), 97-112. "Explaining Ghost"  
 Wang (1962), 239-49. "All about the Ghosts"  
 Liu (2018). "The Realm of Ghosts"

**Secondary Readings:**

- Poo (2008)  
 Poo (1995), 41-68.  
 Poo (2000)  
 Sterckx (2013)  
 Company (1991)

**Special Topics:**

- Avenging Ghosts  
Cohen (1979)
- Exorcising the evil  
Sou (2016)
- Administrating the Dead  
Nickerson (2006)

Week 11. April 3 **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 12. April 10 **Beyond the Afterlife: Remembrance and Ancestral Worship in China**

**Topics:**

- Memory and Identity
- Ancestor
- Death, Time, and Transformation

**Primary Readings:**

- Cook (2016), 92-100. Shi Qiang Pan.
- Shaughnessy (2007)
- Ebrey (1980)

**Secondary Readings:**

- Falkenhausen (1993), 31-66. Ch 1.
- Brashier (2011)
- Bokenkamp, 1-32. Chs. 4 and 5 (Connect on Tripod)

**Special Topics:**

- Remembrance and Forgetting  
     Owen (1986), Ch. 2.
- Stelae  
     Brashier (2004), vol. 2, 1027-59.
- Mortality and immortality  
     Shi (2012)

Week 13. April 17 **Beyond the Afterlife: Reincarnation or Nothing in Greece**

**Topics:**

- Alternatives to the Underworld
- 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*
- 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* (on reserve in Carpenter)
- *Epicurean philosophy and death*  
     Philodemus *On Death* (on reserve in Carpenter)



Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecius*  
Warren, *Facing death: Epicurus and his critics* (on reserve in Carpenter)  
- *Neoplatonic ideas of reincarnation*  
Neoplatonists on Reincarnation: excerpts from Plotinus, Proclus, etal.  
Baltzly, Patriarchy, Metempsychosis and Women in the Neoplatonic Commentary  
Tradition  
[Proclus, *in Remp.* XVI]

Week 14. April 24 **Student Reports**

Week 15. May 1 **Conclusions**

## Bibliography

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