Classics 191: Winter 2015  
Death and Dying in the Roman World  
Tuesday 2:00-4:50

Course Description

Celebrations of death, whether they be violent displays, aristocratic funerals, or funerary monuments played a prominent role in the daily life of ancient Rome. Though death awaited all, the way it came about, and the mode of funerary commemoration varied greatly depending upon one's specific social situation. There was no single Roman way of death, no one funeral, and no one general attitude towards death. Snippets of direct testimony and historical description survive, but the path to an understanding of death in ancient Rome must wend its way through archaeological remains, sarcophagi and tombs, sculpture and inscriptions, epitaphs of gladiators, children, and women, funeral orations, both genuine and facetious, laws that prescribe corpse treatment and burial practice, literary treatments of the afterlife, and cynical treatments of the funeral. The class will explore seven major themes, death's images, literary and iconographic, suicide, the afterlife, the funeral, monuments of the dead, attitudes toward the dead (the death business), and, finally, the violent spectacle of death.

Required texts available to purchase at ASUCLA Textbook Store


Course Reader:  
Electronic reserve (CCLE)

Recommended texts

Requirements and Grading
Attendance and active participation in the seminar are required. Students will also give one 30-minute class report during the seminar from the list of topics in the syllabus. After the first two weeks of mostly introductory materials, we will aim to discuss two or three topics each week. There will be no course examinations; instead you will be graded on your in-class performance and ability to discuss weekly reading assignments. A final project (digital project or formal paper) will research one aspect of death and dying in the Roman world. A breakdown of grading percentages follows:
- class participation 25%
- one seminar-style class report 25%;
- and research project 50%

syllabus in progress

Week 1
Introduction: Death and Dying in the Roman World
Topics:  
  The Nature of the Evidence  
  The Topography of Death (UCLA Visualization Portal)  
  Case studies: dying in the Roman world
Readings:  

Week 2
Origins and Practice
Topics:  
  Etruscan roots  
  Cremation and Burial Practices  
  Interpreting the Evidence: modern comparanda
Class Report:  
  There and Back Again: The Roman Practice of Cremation  
  Ash Chests and Sarcophagi: biography, myth, and imagery
Readings:  
  Toynbee, J. M. C. Death and Burial in the Roman World. 11-42, 101-113.  
  Walker, Susan, “Memorials to the roman dead.” 18-54.
Additional Readings for Reports:  
  Davies, Glenys. "Burial in Italy up to Augustus." 13-19.  
  Noy, David. "'Half-Burnt on an Emergency Pyre’ 186-96.

Week 3
Preparing for Death and the Afterlife
Topics:  
  Roman Attitudes toward the Afterlife  
  Preparing for Death: the imagines and the epitaph
Class Reports:  
  Representations of the Afterlife in Ancient Literature  
  Death and the afterlife in Epigraphy  
  Ghosts
Readings:  
  Cicero de re publica 9-29 “The Dream of Scipio”  
  Vergil Book 6 (Selections)  
  Propertius 4.7, 11
Courtney, E. "I Republican Inscriptions." In Musa Lapidaria 34-49.
Courtney, E. "II K Imperial Inscriptions: Epitaphs." In Musa 158-93.
Cumont, Franz. After Life in Roman Paganism. 44-89

Additional Readings for Reports:
Burke, Paul F. Jr. "Roman Rites for the Dead And Aeneid 6" 220-28.

Week 4
The Spectacle of the Roman Funeral (UCLA Visualization Portal)
Topics: Practical matters
The sites, the sights, and the sounds
Class Reports: Political Propaganda and the Laudatio Funebris
The Funeral of Julius Caesar
The Procession in Rome: pompa funebris and the triumph
Readings:
Polybius 6.52-54
Suetonius Caesar 84-88
Toynbee, J. M. C. Death and Burial in the Roman World. 43-64
Jones, Christopher. "Interrupted Funerals." 588-600.
Sumi, Geoffrey S. "Impersonating the Dead: Mimes at Roman Funerals." 559-85.
Additional Readings for Reports:
Beard, Mary. "The Triumph of the Absurd: Roman Street Theatre” 21-43.
Flower, Harriet I. "Praising the Ancestors: Laudationes and Other Orations” 128-58.
Purcell, Nicholas. "Does Caesar Mime” 9-36.

Week 5
The Spectacle of the Roman Funeral II (UCLA Visualization Portal)
Topics: The Logistics and Topography of the Funeral Games
Death and Drama
The Game of Death in Ancient Rome
Class Reports: Gladiatorial combat: origins and evolution
Roman Attitudes toward spectacular violence
Commemorating the warrior: gladiators and soldiers
Readings: Terence Adelphoe (excerpts)
Kyle, Donald G. Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome. 1-14, 34-54, 76-102
Courtney, E. "I.i Games, Public Performances and Performers." 112-23.
Welch, K. "The Roman Arena in Late-Republican Italy: A New Interpretation." 59-79.

Additional Readings for Reports:
Hope, Valerie M. "Negotiating Identity and Status" 179-95.
Hope, Valerie M. "Fighting for Identity" 93-113.

Week 6

Houses for the Dead
When Emperors Die (Mourning and Mocking)
The Performance at the Tomb
The Streets of Death
Tombs in Foreign lands

Class Reports: The Mausoleum of Augustus in Context
Tombs of Roman Freedmen

Readings: Seneca, Apolocyntosis
Toynbee, J. M. C. Death and Burial in the Roman World. 118-163.
———. "Tragic Images": The Representation of the Dead." 63-78.
Koortbojian, Michael. "In Commemorationem Mortuorum: Text and Image Along the 'Streets of Tombs'." 210-33.

Additional Readings for Reports:
Davies, Penelope J. E. "The Power of Place." In Death and the Emperor 136-71.

Week 7

The Roman Funeral III

Topics Women and Children: The Source material.
Pets
Class Reports: Praising Women: the Laudatio Turiae
Burying Children
Reading: The Laudatio Turiae
The Laudatio Murdiea

King, Margaret. "Commemoration of Infants on Roman Funerary Inscriptions." 117-54.
Patterson, John R. "Patronage, Collegia and Burial in Imperial Rome." 15-27.

Additional Readings for Reports:
Wistrand, Erik Karl Hilding. The So-Called Laudatio Turiae.
Suet. Jul. 6.1
Huskinson, Janet. *Roman Children’s Sarcophagi*

**Week 8**

**The Death Business**
- Burying the masses
- Dealing with the dead
- Mourning

**Class Reports:** Sarcophagi – (case studies in form and meaning)
- Death Pollution
- Burying Slaves (The Columbaria)

**Project Outline/Draft Due**

**Readings:**
- Lucian *de Luctu*
- Lex Libitinæ
- ———. "The Organization of the Funerary Trade at Puteoli and Cumae." 147-68.

**Additional Readings for Reports:**
- ———. "Inscriptions from the Columbarium of the Statilii." 92-107
- Lindsay, Hugh. "Death-Pollution and Funerals in the City of Rome." 85-103.

**Week 9**

**Suicide**
- Roman Attitudes toward Suicide
- Methods and means
- Political suicide and modern comparanda.

**Class Reports:** The Suicide of the Cato
- Seneca on Suicide

**Readings:**
- Tacitus *Annales* 16.18-19
- Hill, Timothy. "The Concept of Political Suicide at Rome." 183-212.
- Griffin, M. "Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: I." 64-77.
- Van Hoof, Anton J. L. "Suicide and Parasuicide in Ancient Personal Testimonies." 76-82.
Additional Readings for Reports:
The Volokh Conspiracy - Nice way to go (blog post)

**Week 10**

**Transitions**
Dying in the rest of the World
Modern funerals, modern spectacle

Class Reports: When worlds collide: pagan and Christian Imagery
Martyrs

**Final Project Due**

Readings:

Perpetua

———. "The Nature of Martyrdom." 201-16.
Harries, Jill. "Death and the Dead in the Late Roman West." 56-67.

Additional Readings for Reports: