

*Burial Rituals, Ideas of Afterlife, and the Individual in the Hellenistic World and the Roman Empire.* Edited by KATHARINA WALDNER – RICHARD GORDON – WOLFGANG SPICKERMANN. Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 57. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2016. ISBN 978-3-515-11546-9. 264 pp. EUR 52.

Attitudes towards death can tell us much about ancient societies. They paint an image not just of religious discourse and the depth of religious understanding, but also touch upon cultural differences and attitudes towards public and private grief. They allow for insights into political culture, ritual practice and architectural design.. Recent approaches have encouraged scholars to recognise individual religion. In attempting to recognise individuality in religious experience and attitudes towards death across a significant time span and geographical area, the editors of this volume allow for a remarkable array of different voices and approaches. This allows for timely discussions both of the familiar and the unfamiliar, and ties into recent scholarly approaches towards ancient religion (*Religious individuation in historical perspective* and *Lived Ancient Religion*). The overall approach then is commendable, for religion must be placed firmly in its direct setting, and effort should be made to look for localised and individual responses to religious and eschatological ideas.

The book opens with a concise and succinct introduction by Waldner, Gordon and Spickermann (7–14). This sets the volume up rather well, and although a wider engagement with the dominant scholarly perspectives would have been useful, there are some excellent points made here, in particular (echoing the approach taken by Emma-Jayne Graham in her article ‘Becoming persons, becoming ancestors. Personhood, memory and the corpse in Roman rituals of social remembrance’, published in *Archaeological Dialogues* in 2009) that we must be cautious in looking to funerary monuments as representing ‘just one fixed identity;’ (9). This is an important and powerful reminder for each of us when we look at anything attributed to death, for not only is this marking the final stage of life, it is also choosing to engage in a particular discourse at a particular moment, for purposes that may be difficult for us to see.

The book is divided between three sections, and this division does not quite work, in part because of the variety of different approaches taken. Part 1 ‘From Homer to Lucian – Poetics of the Afterlife’ presents poetic engagement and exploration of death, and although each chapter offers useful observations, each of them appear a touch embryonic, and this limits the depth of analysis and strength of argument. Matijević (‘The Evolution of the Afterlife in Archaic Greece’, 15–30) challenges the notion of linear development, Bremmer (‘The construction of an individual eschatology: The case of the Orphic gold leaves’, 31–52) focusses on individual eschatological attitudes and the influence of religious practices and thoughts beyond the polis religion, Obryk (‘Prote im Land der Negationen: Per negationem definiertes Nachleben in einer griechischen Grabinschrift’, 53–66) considers metrical grave inscription, and Spickermann (‘Tod und Jenseits bei Lukian von Samosata und Tatian’, 67–81) discusses Lucian of Samosata’s satire. Of these chapters Obryk’s is the strongest. In looking in detail at the source she creates a compelling sense of individual practice and response, engaging with diessseitig and *Jenseits*.

Part 2 ‘Individual Elaborations in the Roman Empire’ demonstrates differences across the Roman world and draws upon some excellent evidence. Höpken’s chapter (‘Gefangene zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits: Außergewöhnliche Bestattungen im römischen Gräberfeld um St. Gereon in

Köln', 83–108) provides a compelling discussion of burial practice, suggesting a possible fear of the dead returning to haunt the living. This does not reflect cultural norms but appears focussed on those who may have died suddenly and unexpectedly. It also may reflect the fears of those involved for their own future: '[d]iese Sorge galt vermutlich aber nicht nur den Toten, die man auf ihrem letzten Weg zum Grab begleite, sondern auch dem eigenen Tod – man wollte nicht zwischen dem Diesseits und Jenseits gefangen sein' (97). Although difficult to fully prove, the evidence is well analysed here. Rosenberger ('Coping with Death: Private Deification in the Roman Empire', 109–124) asks important questions concerning private deification in Roman funerary inscriptions (e.g. *mater sanctissima et dea*; Callicla Pyrras at 115), but is difficult in so short a space to fully explore these isolated incidents of deification. It strikes me that they may simply be personal familial devotion, rather than anything religious or imitative of the imperial household. The gender and age must have some bearing on this. The chapters by Gasparini and Stadler complement each other well in looking to Egyptian influence and sources, but the arguments in both can be challenged, in part because of the nature of the evidence used ('"I will not be thirsty. My lips will not be dry: Individual Strategies of Re-constructing the Afterlife in the Isiac Cults', 125–150; 'Dioskourides, Tanaweruow, Titus Flavius Demetrius et al. Or: How Appealing was an Egyptian Afterlife?', 151–166). The Isiac inscriptions are highly complex artefacts, and although Gasparini engages well with each of them, the different circumstances and periods limit their use in framing a comprehensive argument. The *Papyrus Harkness* is rightly famed, and Stadler is an accomplished guide to both the source and the world it belongs to, presenting an excellent examination of the source and other instances where individuals sought to place themselves in an Egyptian afterlife. However, each source chosen needed to be set up more fully, in particular by examining the context(s) in greater detail.

Part 3 'Making a Difference: Groups and their Claims' characterises the diverse approaches seen throughout the book, with discussion of Jewish eschatology by Bergmann ('Identity on the Menu: Imaginary Meals and Ideas of the World to Come in Jewish Apocalyptic Writings', 167–188), early Christianity by Merkt ('"A Place for My Body": Aspects of Individualisation in Early Christian Funerary Culture and Eschatological Thought', 189–206) and the cult of Mithras by Gordon ('"Den Jungstier auf den goldenen Schultern tragen": Mythos, Ritual und Jenseitsvorstellungen im Mithraskult', 207–250). Each of these provide useful questions and insightful observations, but each of them could have been twice as long to fully explore all the relevant points and factors. The three do work well together in thinking about commonality and shared identity, but rather more could have been made of the evidence selected. Of the three Gordon's exploration of Mithras is the most persuasive.

To close, the approach to the study of ancient religion showcased here is both necessary and important. However, it needs to be supported by close and focussed analysis, with an awareness of the wider contexts to which each piece is responding and engaging. There are chapters here that are strong, and others that contain some excellent and compelling observations. There are also moments that appear speculative and descriptive. The ambition is commendable, but this volume needed to be much longer, to give the necessary space to fully develop the arguments being made.

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