

## INTRODUCTION

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This volume is based on the results of a conference held at the University of Erfurt in September 2012. In our call for papers we asked a highly ambitious and complex question: How, in the diverse and heterogeneous cultures of the ancient Mediterranean from Hellenistic to Roman Times, did discourses and practices relating to death, dying, the dead, and their post-mortem existence interact with each other as well as with individuality and the individual? The conference subject itself was developed in the context of two research projects at the Max Weber Centre of Erfurt University: ‘Religious individualisation in historical perspective’<sup>1</sup> and ‘Lived Ancient Religion’.<sup>2</sup> Both research programmes aim to overcome the dominance of “the public religion perspective (...) of accounts of ancient Mediterranean religion during the last decades”.<sup>3</sup> Especially religious practices related to individual crisis, e.g. votive offerings, the use of divination and ‘magic’, but also burial rites and the cult of the dead cannot be adequately grasped by notions such as ‘cults’, ‘polis religion’ or ‘embedded religion’, though each of these terms has its own value at other levels of analysis.<sup>4</sup> Beyond this, the Lived Ancient Religion approach<sup>5</sup> focuses in particular on individual choices, inventions (*bricolage*) and ideas produced in response to contingent situations in daily life. These choices and inventions, of course, always relate to a given cultural environment, be it a small village in Latium or the Roman Empire as a whole. Such individual choices produce different types of individuality<sup>6</sup> as well as contributing to the lifelong process of individuation (i.e. becoming and remaining a coherent ‘person’ in one’s actions, narratives, and thinking),<sup>7</sup> but also by maintaining a variety of relationships to other individuals, groups and things.<sup>8</sup> The plethora of ritual practices, discourses and narratives that refer to the mainly individual and contingent event of dying are highly relevant to these fields of research. Conversely, questions about individuality and individuation open up

1 KFG 1013, funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG), see <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/max-weber-kolleg/kfg/> (26.06.2016).

2 ERC 2011-ADG-29555, funded by the European Research Council (ERC), see <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/index.php?id=21031&L=1> (26.06.2016).

3 RÜPKE 2013, 4.

4 RÜPKE 2013, 6 with further bibliography.

5 See e.g. RAJA; RÜPKE 2015.

6 RÜPKE 2013, 12–14 distinguishes five types: practical, moral, competitive, representative, and reflexive individuality.

7 On religious individuation cf. RÜPKE 2013, 14–23; on the function of networks and narratives see EIDINOW 2011.

8 On the relational aspects of individuality see e.g. WOOLF 2013, 153f.

new perspectives on the overwhelming amount of archaeological evidence from the necropoleis of the ancient world.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, discourses and narratives about death, burial and afterlife were often a medium for reflecting upon theories of the self and the person,<sup>10</sup> reflections that are themselves highly relevant to the question about individualisation in ancient religion.<sup>11</sup> The contributions in this volume thus cannot hope to offer more than a few illustrative insights in a still new and promising field of research on death and the individual in the ancient world.<sup>12</sup>

Before we present the main insights of the individual chapters, it might be useful to outline our approach to basic anthropological dimensions of human death, in order to avoid projecting our contemporary view of death on the ancient evidence. In a famous article, the social anthropologist (and grand-nephew of Émile Durkheim) Maurice Bloch made two important observations that emerge from fieldwork concerning death and funerary rituals.<sup>13</sup> First, in many societies death is not seen as a limited, purely biological, event but as a process reaching far beyond the moment of death as constructed by contemporary medical science. Funerary rituals and death-cult, which often encompass multiple burials and post-mortem manipulations of the corpse, are therefore seen by these societies as essential to enable and further the process of moving from one state to another.<sup>14</sup> The second observation concerns related ideas or theories of the person or the individual. Our own notion of the indivisibility of the individual (what Bloch calls the ‘bounded individual’), who dies at a certain moment, is not shared by many cultures; far more common is the idea of an ‘unbounded person’ whose constituent elements continue to exist at different places and in different forms.<sup>15</sup> Such an assumption is intuitively illuminating for the ancient world, allowing us, for example, to resolve the famous Homeric paradox of the dual existence of Heracles as *autos* in heaven and as ‘shadow’ in Hades (*Od.* 11, 601–604).<sup>16</sup> Bloch goes on to explore an ethnographic example which shows that after death the ‘individual’ part of a person is thought to continue its existence in a certain form and at a certain place (e.g. in heaven with ‘Allah’ vel

9 The bibliography is, of course, abundant. Basic for Ancient Greece are e.g. BREMMER 1983; MORRIS 1989; MORRIS 1992; SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1995; JOHNSTON 1999; GARLAND 2001; BREMMER 2002. Ancient Rome: e.g. EDWARDS 2007; HOPE 2009; RÜPKE, SCHEID 2010; BORG 2013. Late Antiquity and Early Christianity: e.g. DIEFENBACH 2007; REBILLARD 2009; AMELING 2011; BROWN 2015. On archaeology in general: TARLOW; STUTZ 2013.

10 Cf. MARTIN; BARRESSI 2006.

11 Cf. RÜPKE; WOOLF 2013. On the myth of Hippolytus as medium for thinking about the boundaries between gods, heroes and human beings, cf. WALDNER 2016 (forthcoming).

12 The topic of the relation between death and individualisation in the ancient world seems to have been almost entirely neglected (but cf. VERNANT 1989, WALDNER 2011), with the exception of the very interesting and relevant discussions in archaeology about body, personal identity and memory, e.g. GRAHAM 2009; DEVLIN, GRAHAM 2015.

13 BLOCH 1988.

14 BLOCH 1988, 11–15.

15 BLOCH 1988, 15–17.

16 The paradox is discussed in the chapters by Krešimir Matijević and Wolfgang Spickermann.

sim.) whereas the ‘collective’ part exists in a different form, as ‘ancestor’, thus ensuring the continuity of the group.<sup>17</sup>

In the ancient field, it is mainly archaeologists who are currently addressing the implications of such ethnographic data for our interpretation of ancient death.<sup>18</sup> Emma-Jayne Graham, for example, has pointed out that one should not take funerary monuments as evidence for the assumption that a given person had just one fixed identity.<sup>19</sup> Rather, such monuments are just one aspect of a complex ritual procedure to cope with a new social situation after death “by removing the dead from their previous position within society and reintegrating both living and dead into a changed world”.<sup>20</sup> She convincingly argues that in analysing the remains of funeral rituals we should concentrate on the triangle of “personhood, death and the body”.<sup>21</sup> Our volume shows that raising questions about the individual leads to new insights on the very same basis. We should however bear in mind that the often deplorable state of the evidence almost invariably limits our contributions to particular stages of the protracted overall process of death, dying and ultimate separation. It is these anthropological and pragmatic considerations we should bear in mind when we turn to look at the individual chapters.

The first section, entitled “From Homer to Lucian – Poetics of the Afterlife”, concentrates on the twofold question of how poetics was used by individuals to express their ideas about death and how they dealt with the highly conventional material of traditional poetry, especially the Homeric epics. Krešimir Matijević (“The evolution of afterlife in Archaic Greece”) shows how difficult it is to take Homeric epics as direct evidence for changing social attitudes towards death in Archaic Greece. He is especially critical of the fairly widespread conviction that one should see a historical evolution from *Iliad* to *Odyssey* with the famous *Nekyia* of Odysseus in Bk. 11.<sup>22</sup> He emphasizes rather the sheer variety of epic representations of the heroes’ post-mortem fate. Very few of them – Heracles and Menelaus, for example, but also such hybrid figures as the Dioscuri – are granted the privilege of taking their personal identity beyond the threshold of death. It is hard to say whether we should take these cases as a sort of deification, and thus as a reference to the emergence of the ‘hero cult’ in the early Archaic period. What is clear, however, is that the narrative discourse about these outstanding individuals became a kind of template for further social and cultural practices and discourses seeking to conceptualize the post-mortem existence of the dead in the following periods. Nevertheless, the Homeric poetics of the afterlife was not central for the authors of the so-called Orphic gold leaves that were deposited in graves (most of them belonging to obvi-

17 BLOCH 1988, 18–21.

18 GRAHAM 2009; HOPE 2001; TARLOW, STUTZ 2013; DEVLIN, GRAHAM 2015.

19 GRAHAM 2009.

20 GRAHAM 2009, 53.

21 GRAHAM 2009, 53–55.

22 See also MATIJEVIĆ 2015.

ously wealthy people) mainly in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>23</sup> Jan N. Bremmer (“The construction of an individual eschatology: The case of the Orphic gold leaves”) shows that the *bricolage* of old and new ideas by which these authors expressed highly individual ideas about the afterlife was inspired by the Eleusinian Mysteries but also by Egyptian materials. He points out that in the Orphic imaginary the dead kept their identities as persons even in Hades by contrast with the Homeric eschatology, whereby the dead are reduced to a shadowy collective existence in the Underworld. It seems likely that these highly original ideas were developed in the stimulating colonist milieu of Southern Italy, which also produced original thinkers such as Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Empedocles.

Matylda Obyrk (“Prote im Land der Negationen: Per Negationem definiertes Nachleben in einer griechischen Grabinschrift”) studies the metrical funeraries (dating mainly from the first to the third centuries CE) that give expression to the idea that the dead person will live on not just in the memory of the relatives but that he or she will continue to exist in some other place. Such ideas are extremely uncommon among the huge mass of extant funeral monuments.<sup>24</sup> Their very existence is thus in itself evidence for a highly individualized practice in coping with death. Obyrk shows in detail how the authors of such texts, who are obviously educated, tackle the very difficult task of representing a better life after death. The general line is some variation on that of the Orphic texts and the Homeric narratives about certain heroes, namely that the identity of the person survives after death. This almost automatically involves mythical stories about divinization, like that of Ganymede, and/or some reference to the idea that the deceased lives now in close companionship with the immortal gods. At this point we may ask whether a growing commitment can be discerned to the idea that ordinary people too may become ‘heroes’ or even gods after their death. Examples of ‘private’ heroisation do indeed become more frequent from Hellenistic times onwards, and the model of ruler cult seems to have made the idea of apotheosis increasingly attractive.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE satirical writer Lucian of Samosata not only wrote an entire squib (Diatribes) on mourning (*De luctu*) but harshly criticized and mocked traditional funeral customs as well as related ideas on the afterlife (especially those deriving from the Homeric and Platonic tradition) and the trends towards heroisation and apotheosis we have already mentioned. Wolfgang Spickermann studies the relevant texts in his chapter on Lucian (“Tod und Jenseits am Beispiel des Lukian von Samosata”) and points to the fact that Lucian’s critique is not that far away from contemporary Christian apologists such as Tatian. If one looks at some details of Lucian’s satirical representations of the afterlife it is striking that he seems to insist on a very corporeal and individual form of the ‘souls’ in Hades: one of his protagonists for instance recognizes the soul of Socrates by its protruding belly and bald head (*Philops.* 22–24).

23 GRAF, JOHNSTON 2013.

24 See also OBYRK 2012.

In the second section, entitled “Individual Elaborations in the Roman Empire” the authors explore cases that show the immense variety of cultural ideas and practices concerning death and the ways that individuals interpret and deploy them according to social status and geographical location. Constanze Höpken describes the archaeological remains of a very striking cemetery (St. Gereon) in the provincial centre Cologne with a disproportionately large number of burials of young men/soldiers, young mothers/*puerperas* and children, many of them buried upside down. The exceptional and sometimes violent treatment of the bodies is not due to ethnic or cultural differences but rather attests to the widespread idea that individuals who suffered sudden or violent death had somehow to be prevented from haunting the living.<sup>25</sup> Veit Rosenberger (“Coping with death: Private deification in the Roman Empire”) deals with an unusual type of funerary in Latin in which the dead person – as it happens they are all female – is referred to as a god (*dea*). It is almost impossible to explain this kind of individual behaviour. It might be inspired by the model of imperial apotheosis or understood as a parallel to the general tendency of freedmen to emphasize their (new) identity by erecting extravagant grave monuments (a clear case of ‘competitive individuality’).<sup>26</sup> The chapters by Valentino Gasparini (“‘I will not be thirsty. My lips will not be dry’: Individual strategies of re-constructing the afterlife in the Isiac cults”) and Martin Andreas Stadler (“Dioskourides, Tanaweruow, Titus Flavius et al. Or: How appealing was an Egyptian afterlife?”) both discuss the “Egyptological presupposition” (Stadler), the common assumption by Egyptologists that, because Egyptian ideas of the afterlife were the most elaborate, they must also have been the most attractive mortuary belief and practice in the whole Ancient Mediterranean. But Stadler shows that the so called “Egyptian afterlife” was far less homogeneous than one might expect. This conclusion fits with Gasparini’s demonstration of individual variation among funeraries produced by followers of Isis that draw on ideas or even single formulae (e.g. the *eupsychēi* formula) clearly based on Egyptian tradition. One can distinguish between well-informed specialists and others who just present traditional Graeco-Roman ideas in Egyptian disguise. In contrast to Gasparini, whose evidence comes from the whole Roman Empire, Stadler concentrates on Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. By analyzing some cases of mixed Graeco-Egyptian burial practices he shows that they in fact refer to a coherent Egyptian system already attested for much earlier periods. Nevertheless, this system itself encompasses an ambiguous attitude to the afterlife, partly resolved by simultaneously entertaining a variety of different ideas that confirm Bloch’s point about the ‘unbounded person’.

The last part of the book (“Making a Difference: Groups and their Claims”) presents three case studies which all refer to so called ‘religious groups’ in the Roman Empire. Claudia D. Bergmann (“Identity on the Menu: Imaginary meals and ideas of the world to come in Jewish apocalyptic writings”) focuses on a highly original and so far neglected motif of Jewish apocalyptic narratives: the description of an

25 Cf. also JOHNSTON 1999.

26 Cf. RÜPKE 2013, 12–13.

imaginary meal which is enjoyed by the righteous in the world to come. The author shows that these narratives create a post-mortem identity based on commensality as well as on the corporeal materiality of each single individual. The early Christian discourse about the individual and its death, discussed by Andreas Merkt (“‘A Place for my Body’: Aspects of individualisation in Early Christian funerary culture and eschatological thought”) shares this concern about commensality and the body. The famous epitaph of Abercius is read by Andreas Merkt as an example of Christian self-presentation by a certain individual. This individual sees himself separated from the traditional, i.e. familiar social affiliations. Instead there is a strong emphasis on community and commensality, especially between the living and the dead, whereas the body is highly valued as a symbol (or should we say ‘synecdoche’?) of personal identity but not as a means of obtaining a vicarious immortality by engendering children. The contemporaries of Abercius who joined Mithraic groups might have shared his delight for commensality but their common meals were a totally earthly/mundane affair. In his chapter on Mithraism Richard Gordon (“Den Jungstier auf den goldenen Schultern tragen: Mythos, Ritual und Jenseitsvorstellungen im Mithraskult”) thoroughly deconstructs the idea that Mithraism was a coherent system with a certain ‘belief’ in afterlife. Mithraic groups were not funded to overcome the gap between life and death with certain rituals but centered on the prestige of a common meal in an exclusive and essentially male group. One thus has to expect intelligent mystagogues creating local variation of Mithraism. Gordon shows that in the often individual arrangements of the iconographic programme of Mithraic dining rooms/Mithraic sanctuaries there were at least three themes that might form the basis of speculation about the idea of an happy afterlife: the *fons perennis*, Mithras ascending to heaven in the Sun’s chariot, and the exemplary cultic meal first celebrated by Mithras and the Sun-god. It was up to each member of the group in the mithraeum if he wanted to see his own fate mirrored in these images or not.

At the end it is a pleasant duty warmly to thank all those people who made the conference as well as the publication of this volume possible. The Fritz Thyssen Stiftung generously sponsored the conference and the preparation of the manuscripts for publication. As so often in the past, Diana Püschel in the Max Weber Centre supported us in preparing the conference, especially on the administrative side. We also thank our many colleagues at the Max Weber Centre, especially the members of the research groups ‘Religious individualisation in historical perspective’ and ‘Lived Ancient Religion’, for inspiring discussions on our topic during and after the conference. Anja Zimmermann sub-edited the manuscripts provisionally, while Mihaela Holban prepared them for final publication and compiled the indices. Maria Scherrer heroically produced a final ready-to-print version with admirable speed and care. We are most grateful to all of them.

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# THE EVOLUTION OF THE AFTERLIFE IN ARCHAIC GREECE

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## Abstract

The article discusses different scientific perceptions of the early Greek afterlife. Jan N. Bremmer identifies changes of attitude towards death already within the Homeric epics and links them with a development Philippe Ariès claimed to have proven for the period of the Middle Ages to the Modern times. Ian Morris on the other hand emphasises the continuity of the Greek concepts of afterlife in the Archaic period. The article demonstrates that no developmental change in beliefs relating to the afterlife took place between the composition of the *Iliad* and that of the *Odyssey*. Still, contrary to Ian Morris, further Archaic literary and epigraphic sources prove that the imagination of the Realm of the dead did change though not in a linear way. Furthermore certain parts of the Homeric concepts continued to exist.

Since the 1980's, the changing concepts of the afterlife during the Greek Archaic and Classical periods have been a topic of debate. Disregarding controversy over detailed issues, it is not to be questioned that eventually afterlife became individualized: one hoped to gain advantage in the hereafter from acts done in this world or even merely from privileged knowledge.<sup>1</sup> It is a subject of debate, however, whether a linear development in one particular direction took place such as the one Philippe Ariès claimed to have proven for the period from the Middle Ages to the Modern era.<sup>2</sup> According to the *communis opinio*, largely formed by various studies from Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood and Jan N. Bremmer, one believes to have discovered a development towards an increasingly individualized afterlife even within the Homeric epics.<sup>3</sup> Ian Morris on the other hand argued that “the general pattern [...] remained little changed from 800 to 500 B.C.”<sup>4</sup>

1 Cf. e.g. BALTES 1988, 99f.

2 ARIÈS 1974 and 1977.

3 SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1981, 15–39; 1983, 33–48 and 1995, 52–56, 413–441; BREMMER 1994, 94–96 and 2002, 5. JOHNSTON 1999, 95–99 shares this view. Ultimately the idea seems to go back to BURKERT 2011<sup>2</sup>, 302 (304 in the first German edition from 1977 and 197 in the English edition from 1985) who spoke of “contradictory motifs [in Homer] which contain the germs of a radical transformation in beliefs concerning the afterlife.” Cf. MATIJEVIĆ 2015 on the origin and character of the Homeric afterlife.

4 MORRIS 1989, 301. He is supported by ENGELS 1998, 43, who nonetheless speaks of an “offene Diskussion”. Cf. also DERDERIAN 2001, 190 n. 1: “[...] ongoing dialogue [...]”.

It is not possible to explore all details of this discussion in this paper. Instead, I would like to briefly acquaint the reader with the positions of the researchers mentioned and then focus on the Early Archaic period, paying particular attention to the Homeric epics.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. The controversy

In an overview of the evolution of Greek concepts of the afterlife in the Archaic and Classical periods, Jan N. Bremmer summed up the findings of Philippe Ariès's book "L'Homme devant la mort" published in 1977 by stating: "There is, then, in Western Europe a development of an attitude that goes from accepting death, via fearing death, to finally concealing death. At the same time, we see a corresponding change in interest in the afterlife. From relative unimportance, it becomes the overwhelming focus of interest, and at the moment, belief in it seems to be gradually disappearing."<sup>6</sup> Bremmer himself pointed out various shortcomings of Ariès's study, for example, that the author tends to neglect differences between various social groups.<sup>7</sup> Bremmer remains nevertheless convinced of the parallel development concerning the link between attitudes towards death and respective concepts of the hereafter, as proposed by Ariès:

<u>Development of attitude towards death and of interest in the afterlife according to Ph. Ariès</u>
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Acceptance of death → fear of death → concealment of death Relative unimportance of the afterlife → great interest in the afterlife → disappearance of afterlife beliefs
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Bremmer believes furthermore to have identified such a development from the Greek Archaic to the Classical period.<sup>8</sup> In accordance with his theory and parallel to Ariès, the first identified phase constitutes "Tamed or Domesticated Death". An example of this attitude is Athena telling Telemachus that death is common to all and not even the gods can save a beloved human from dying.<sup>9</sup> Further, according to the Homeric concept, personified Death, namely Thanatos, is twin brother to Hypnos,<sup>10</sup> who is the personification of Sleep, which demonstrates in Bremmer's view

5 I will not discuss the dispute over the interpretation of the archaeological finds from the early Greek Archaic and their relation to the Homeric epics; see the different position of SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1981, 33–37 and 1983, 43–47; MORRIS 1989, 314–320.

6 BREMMER 1994, 95.

7 Ibid. n. 12; cf. also MORRIS 1987, 35f.; MIRTO 2012, 162f.

8 BREMMER 1994, 95f. This observation is already made by SOURVINOU-INWOOD (1981, 17; 1983, 34; 1995, 301), though she is not assuming a parallel development of attitudes towards death and interest in the afterlife.

9 Hom. *Od.* 3, 236–238; cf. BREMMER 1994, 96.

10 Hom. *Il.* 14, 231; 16, 672.