BOOK REVIEW

Burial Rituals, Ideas of Afterlife, and the Individual in the Hellenistic World and the Roman Empire. By KATHARINA WALDNER, RICHARD GORDON and WOLFGANG SPICKERMANN, eds. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016. Pp. 264. Paper, €52. ISBN 978-3-515-11546-9.

Death is a powerful, disruptive event, and the strategies humans have developed to cope with it are myriad. In recent years, considerable scholarly attention has focused on the complex interplay between death, eschatological belief, and the individual.[1] Following this trend, Waldner, Gordon, and Spickermann's book advances the ongoing conversation through the presentation of new insights into the relationship between death and the individual.

Based on the results of a conference held at the University of Erfurt in September 2012, this multi-disciplinary volume features essays authored by scholars in the fields of Egyptology, ancient history, archaeology, patristics, and the history of religion. As a result, the subject matter of the book's eleven essays range in date from the Hellenistic through Roman periods. The overarching concern, however, that unites the essays centers on the interaction between discourses and practices as they relate to death and eschatological beliefs in the Mediterranean region.

The volume begins with an introduction written by the editors (Waldner, Gordon, and Spickermann), which describes the genesis and organization of the book. The essays that follow are divided into three parts. Part 1, "From Homer to Lucian—Poetics of the Afterlife," explores the ways in which poetics served as a medium to express ideas about death. Chapter 1 (Krešimir Matijević) considers the degree to which the concept of the afterlife changed between the writing of the Homeric epics and the Archaic period. Despite arguments to the contrary, Matijević asserts that eschatological beliefs manifest in the Iliad and the Odyssey are fundamentally the same. A shift, however, occurs in the Archaic period—although it is clear that Homeric beliefs persist, the boundaries between the living and dead are conceived of as more fluid. Chapter 2 (Jan Bremmer) focuses on the vision of

[1] For examples, see E.-J. Graham. 2009. "Becoming Persons, Becoming Ancestors: Personhood, Memory and the Corpse in Roman Rituals and Social Remembrance." *Archaeological Dialogues* 16: 51–74; Z. L. Devlin and E.-J. Graham (eds.) 2015. *Death Embodied: Archaeological Approaches to the Treatment of the Corpse.* Oxford.

the Underworld as set forth in the Orphic Gold Leaves, which date primarily to the 4th through 3rd centuries BCE. Through the systematic study of their texts, Bremmer reveals that the dead were believed to retain a high degree of individuality in the afterlife (in opposition to earlier Homeric descriptions), and the geography of the Underworld described in the gold leaves was inspired by the Eleusinian Mysteries as well as Egyptian models (e.g. the Underworld topography described in The Book of the Dead). He also points to southern Italy, with its innovative intellectual culture, as the place where these new beliefs coalesced. Furthermore, Chapter 3 (Matylda Obryk) analyzes metrical funerary inscriptions (ca. 1st to 3rd centuries CE) that espouse the hope for a happy afterlife, while Chapter 4 (Wolfgang Spickermann) brings to the fore the parallels between Lucian's critique of funerary practices and eschatological beliefs (ca. 2nd century BCE) and those of contemporary Christian apologists, such as Tatian.

Part 2, "Individual Elaborations in the Roman Empire," centers on the ways in which social status and geographical location shape attitudes toward death. Chapter 5 (Constanze Höpken) presents archaeological evidence from a cemetery in Cologne (St. Gereon, ca. 1st century CE) where a disproportionate amount of young individuals were bound in their graves. This behavior is interpreted as necrophobic and reflects the widespread belief that those who die violently or "too soon" are apt to return from the grave as revenants. Chapter 6 (Veit Rosenberger) discusses Roman funerary inscriptions (ca. 1st to 2nd centuries CE) in which the dead (all female) are referred to as a god (dea), an occurrence which may be related to imperial apotheosis or the tendency of freedman to commission aggrandizing funerary monuments. Chapter 7 (Valentino Gasparini) and Chapter 8 (Martin Andreas Stadler) focus on Egyptian material. Gasparini considers the selective appropriation of Egyptian eschatological beliefs through the careful study of six Greco-Roman funerary inscriptions connected to the cult of Isis, while Stadler examines the complex, and often conflicting, beliefs in the afterlife that existed in Egypt before the Hellenistic period and persisted throughout the Roman one.

The third and final part, "Making a Difference: Groups and their Claims," explores the experiences of various religious groups within the Roman Empire. Chapter 9 (Claudia Bergmann) discusses the concept of postmortem dining in early Jewish apocryphal texts. The belief in this shared meal of the righteous, which was intended to take place in the afterlife, helped to solidify community bonds and suggested that the individual retained its physical form after death. Chapter 10 (Andreas Merkt) considers the epitaph of Abericus (2nd century CE) and explains

how it illustrates growing individualization in early Christian funerary culture. The last chapter, Chapter 11 (Richard Gordon), explains that Mithraism was not a coherent set of beliefs with a fixed understanding of the afterlife. Indeed, what little is known about Mithraic afterlife expectations derives from paintings on the walls of Mithraic dining rooms and sanctuaries.

Overall, the book would have benefitted from a more developed introduction. The Introduction primarily describes the conference that inspired the volume and provides a summary of the essays contained therein. An expanded historiography would have been useful, as would a clear statement of the volume's unique contribution to the field. Nevertheless, the essays are interesting and thought-provoking, and their special focus on religious syncretism (e.g. Isaic cults) and neglected topics (e.g. the mortuary meal of the righteous described in Jewish apocalyptic texts) makes them of particular value to the scholar of ancient Mediterranean funerary practices and beliefs. As such, it is hoped that the essays presented in help shape future discourse on death, eschatology, and the individual.

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